

MR. GASCAR STUDYING THE MAPS

TREASURE AHEAD

BY IAN SERRAILLIER

Illustrated by C. WALTER HODGES

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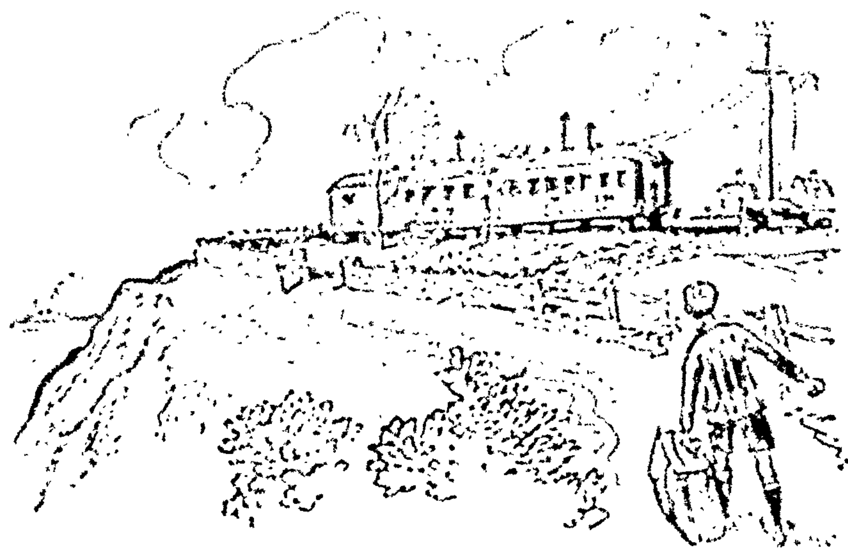
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CHAPTER I

A MAN NAMED GASCAR

"Uncle Bill, I don't like the look of that man," said David. "I don't trust him an inch."

David had come to stay for a week with his uncle in his home at Port Hilary. Bill Langton lived in an old railway carriage on the cliff top, near the coastguard cottages. It was a very strange home. Each compartment was named after one of his boats, for he was a very keen sailor. A notice in his bedroom said, "Do not get out of the train while it is moving." Another in the dining-room said, "Do not spit—penalty 40 shillings." The

place was untidy with sailing gear. The floors were heaped with the stores that he was going to take with him on his new voyage in search of treasure in the South Atlantic.

"Do you mean Gascar?" said Uncle Bill, checking a box full of tins of jam.

"Yes. I watched him carefully while he was studying the maps and charts that Captain Hardwick left you in his will. His eyes were greedy and rather frightening. You'd be a fool to take him with you. He doesn't want to help you—he wants the treasure for himself."

"Nonsense," said Uncle Bill, looking for a cask of salt beef. "I'm lucky to have found him. He's a native of the Perilous Islands where the treasure is hidden. He's the only man in Europe who knows the straits. I shall need him, with all those reefs about. He knows the native language too and will be very helpful with the native porters."

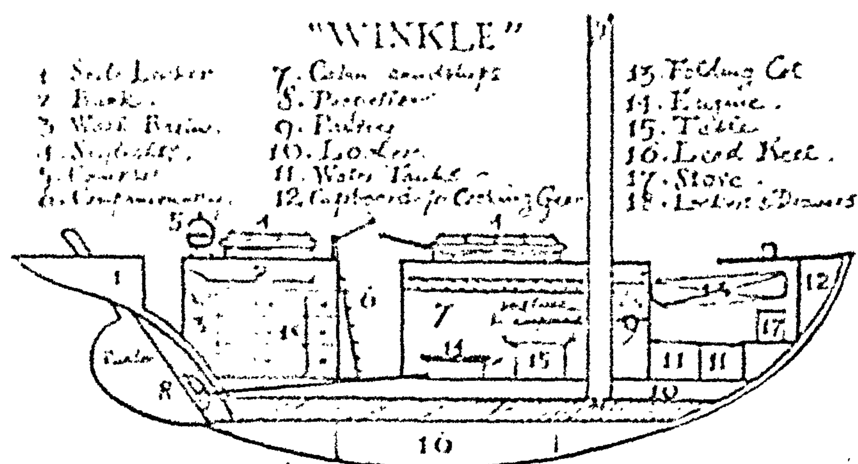
David said nothing. It was no use arguing with Uncle.

In the afternoon Uncle Bill took him down to the harbour to show him his new yacht *Winkle*, in which he was going to sail next week. As he looked down on her from the jetty, he felt very gloomy. He wished he was going to sail in her instead of Gascar. How he hated Gascar!

They walked down the jetty steps and went on board. Climbing down the companion-way, they entered the stern cabin.

"Lovely wood panels," said Uncle Bill, pointing to the walls. "Two bunks, well lit from the sky-light. Lockers underneath."

In the middle of the boat was another cabin, containing a small engine. It ran on a mixture of



petrol and paraffin and was for use in harbour and close waters. In the bow was the "fo'c'sle", with two folding cots and a galley for cooking. Uncle Bill showed David the stove. It was hung on gimbals and stayed upright even when the boat was rolling. He also showed him the water tanks, the compass, and the reefing gear.

"Isn't there room for me to come?" said David.

"Sorry, old boy. Have to wait till you're older."

David was exactly a week older when, two days after his return to London, his mother handed him a letter from Uncle Bill. It was a letter which filled him with delight. It told him that Gascar was, as he had suspected, a cheat and a thief.

"You were right about Gascar," Uncle Bill wrote. "He has forged a cheque on my bank account. And I caught him stealing my charts when he thought I was out for the day. We had a scrap. One of the maps got torn, but I got the others all right and I've stuck the torn pieces together. I suppose he forged the cheque to get money to buy a steamer passage—obviously he meant to go after the treasure without me. I wish I could have handed him over to the police. But he jumped out of the window when I wasn't looking and got away. The worst of it is that he knows where the treasure is hidden. He'll be after it like a flash. There's no time to lose."

The letter ended with an offer to David to take Gascar's place as mate on board *Winkle*. Nothing could have pleased him more. But it still remained for him to persuade his mother to let him go.

This he did by pointing out to her that geography was his weakest subject at school, and the voyage with Uncle Bill would help him to improve. He said nothing about the dangers they would have

to face. But he gave her a splendid box of chocolates and a pair of nylon stockings, correct size. He also promised that when he got back he would do the washing-up twice daily for the rest of his life. What mother could resist that?

A week later she was saying goodbye to him on the jetty at Port Hilary. Quite a crowd had gathered, among them an old whiskery gent who asked a lot of questions about the voyage.

"See the boy keeps his warm underclothes on," said Mother to Uncle Bill. Then she stepped forward to kiss David goodbye.

Suddenly he felt very homesick.

"Start up the engine, David," said Uncle Bill. "We're going out under power."

David hurried below.

"I'll cast off your ropes when you're ready!" shouted the harbour-master.

The engine was throbbing away below. David's head appeared above the companion-way. He climbed on deck.

"Let go forrard!" cried Uncle Bill. "Cast off . . . Slow ahead."

"Goodbye!" cried Mother. "Look after yourselves."

"Goodbye!" cried everybody.

They sailed past the basket light at the entrance

of the harbour and met the swell of the open sea.

"Who's that chap running along the jetty?" said David. "He's waving to us . . . I believe it's that whiskery chap who asked all the questions."

"Here's the telescope," said Uncle Bill.

David raised it to his eye. "Gosh, he's taking his whiskers off. I'm not joking. Have a look." He handed it back to his uncle.

Uncle Bill started with surprise. "I've seen that gentleman before . . . It's Gascar."

David seized the telescope. "Snakes and ladders, so it is . . . And he's running back now, with his whiskers on. Hadn't we better go and capture him?"

Uncle Bill thought for a moment. "He's got a quarter of an hour's start. No, David, we'll let him be."

"I suppose you're right. But I should like to have screwed his neck for him."

"That can wait a month or two—until we reach the island."

"Perhaps he won't be there."

"You can bet your braces he will. He's trying to put us off the scent. He wanted to make us think he's staying in England. Anyhow, we've beaten him at the start—thank goodness for that."

CHAPTER 2

TOUGH GOING

They stayed hove to for their first night at sea. While Uncle Bill attended to the sails, David went below into the stern cabin. Out of the wind and spray it was warm and comfortable. He lit the lamp; hooked it on the rod below the skylight; watched it rock to and fro as the boat moved. Then he hung up his oilskins, undressed, and climbed into his bunk. What a grand little home! Snug and happy, he soon fell asleep.

During the first few days at sea they were so busy that they had no time to think of Gascar or of the treasure they were after. David had plenty to learn. His uncle taught him how to take an observation with the sextant and find out their position.

"First you must find the latitude and longitude," he said. "You find the latitude by measuring the height of the sun at true noon. You find the longitude by working out the difference between local time and Greenwich Mean Time, given by chronometers. After that you have to work out a few sums."

At noon he took the sextant out of its box and showed him how to hold it to his eye and take the observation. "Be sure to get the horizon and not the first wave that comes," he said.

David just had time to get the sight when a big wave smacked the deck and covered them in spray. Then they went down into the cabin to work out their position. David's first answer landed them somewhere in Turkey. But at last they both got the same answer twice running and were able to mark their right position on the chart.

David did most of the cooking, cleaning and pumping, and took his turn at the tiller. There was always plenty to do. On the sixth day one of the paraffin tanks broke loose and it took a long time to fasten. There were ropes to splice, torn sails to mend, and he soon learnt to use marlin-spike, needle and twine. Busy all day, he was glad of his bunk at night. He would fall asleep thinking what a wonderful skipper he had and how proud he was to be his mate. Uncle Bill was a first-rate sailor. When the deck was sloping like the roof of a house, he moved as safely and quickly as if he were on dry land. It was not often that a sudden squall caught him with too much sail set.

In the Bay of Biscay they met cruel storms and roaring seas for days on end. One day was so bad

A nasty thudding sound on deck made him grab at his oilskins. "I'm going to see what's happening. David, you must stay down here. Don't move out of the cabin—unless you want to get drowned."

While his uncle was on deck, for the first time David was really frightened. The seas were heavier than ever. He wondered what would happen if the skylight were stove in and the sea poured into the cabin.

He didn't have long to wait. There was a sudden crash, with glass and sea falling about him. The end of a spar pointed down at him through the skylight. His uncle was shouting to him, but he couldn't hear a word.

He climbed into his bunk and, leaning out, tried to reach the spar and push it back. But his arms were too short. Then he climbed on to the table. Now he could just touch the spar, but the waves blinded him and he could not grasp it. He climbed down.

More glass fell. Looking up, he saw the spar had disappeared. But the hole in the skylight was larger than ever.

He was thinking of going up on deck to help, when suddenly everything darkened. The roof above him was black and he could not see a thing. He felt for his bunk and hauled himself in. Wet,

stiff, and miserable, he lay down. Then there was a terrific blow against the port side, as if a giant boxer were landing a knock-out punch. The boat reeled and staggered.

This is what had happened. Uncle Bill was hard at work tying down his oilskin coat over the broken skylight. He looked up just in time to see an immense wave towering above him. He crouched in the cockpit and clung on to the tiller, bracing himself. The wave burst upon the boat, burying her in water and foam. He felt like a bather swallowed up by a wave and ground down underneath it. All he could do was clench his teeth and hang on. Then, as suddenly as it had come, the wave went. His head was free, and the wave was roaring away to leeward.

It was the last of the big seas, and it left both *Winkle* and her crew exhausted.

Next morning the sun shone upon her, rocking gently on a quiet sea. They were able to have their first good meal for days—bacon and potatoes and toast spread with double rations of butter. As they still felt hungry after that, they filled up with three platefuls of porridge each.

Refreshed, they set to work to repair the damage of the storm. The shrouds were loose and had to be tightened. Blankets, bedding and clothes were

spread on deck or tied to the rigging to dry. While David worked the pumps, Uncle Bill sawed up a plank and boarded up the broken skylight.

These repairs lasted until they reached Gibraltar. Here they spent three busy days, while the port skylight was mended properly, the boat loaded with food, and the water tanks filled. They both had much-needed haircuts.

Compared with their last send-off, their departure from Gibraltar was very quiet. Nobody waved goodbye. Nobody seemed interested in so tiny a boat.

But, unknown to the two sailors, there was one person who had watched them with keen interest. A scruffy little dwarf in rags had been waiting patiently in the harbour for a whole week before they arrived. He had watched the repairs being done. He had followed them through the town. On the fourth day he had seen them leave the harbour. As soon as they had gone, he ran through the streets to a post office, chuckling to himself. He asked for a cablegram form and with a grubby hand wrote out this message:

WINKLE LEFT GIBRALTAR
15TH SEPTEMBER 12 NOON.

And he addressed it to a name in Jungle Island.

wore off. Bathing was better. They could do this whenever the boat was becalmed. David liked to dive off the bowsprit, splash around in the warm water, then climb on board and push his uncle in when he wasn't looking. "Man overboard!" he shouted, and kept his uncle in the water by pushing him off with the boat-hook.

One day something happened which put an end to bathing. Uncle Bill had caught hold of the boat-hook and was trying to pull his mate in after him, when David yelled. A dim shadow in the water was darting towards him. David grabbed his uncle's dripping arm. He hauled until his leg had reached the rail, and the wet, slippery form was sprawling on deck.

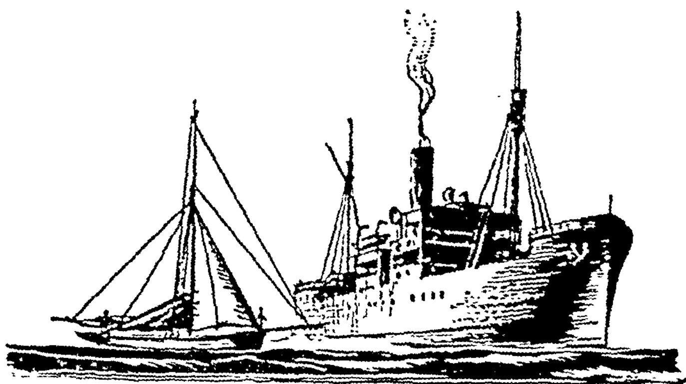
"Whew! that was a near thing," said David.

The horrible shadow beside the boat rolled, showed a white flashing belly, an evil snout and snapping teeth. After that they did not tempt the sharks any more.

During the hot days that followed, it was too hot to do anything but lie about. David became keen on watching for fish. He saw a whale being chased by sword-fish. On the hottest days jelly-fish lay about the boat in millions. They were as big as soup-plates, blue in colour, and you could see right through them. Flying fish would shoot out of the

must wonder what a funny little cork like ours is doing here."

As she approached, his excitement increased. He ran to the tiller and tried to look as if he had sailed *Winkle* right round the world. Uncle Bill climbed the rigging and waved his arms. Just for a joke he signalled a message: "CAN—WE—GIVE—YOU—ANY—HELP?"



She slowed engines and came nearer. *Winkle's* sails began to flap as the wind was stolen from them. On the rusty bow David read the name: *Johnny Bowlegs*.

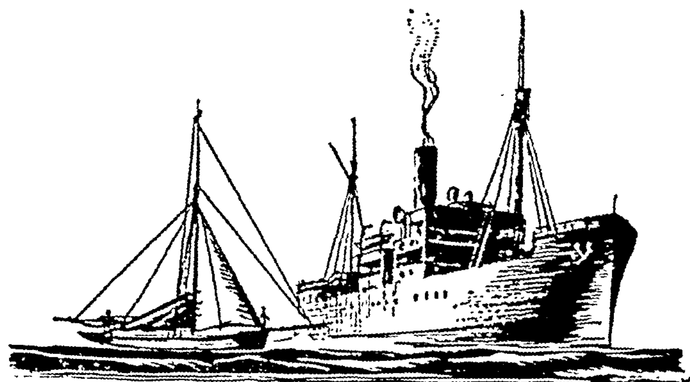
The steamer stopped. Passengers crowded to the rail, surprised to see so tiny a boat on the open sea.

"Dash my buttons," said Uncle Bill. "They're lowering a boat. We'd better heave to and wait."

The ship's boat splashed alongside. Two smiling

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"Dash my buttons," said Uncle Bill. "They're lowering a boat. We'd better heave to and wait."

The ship's boat splashed alongside. Two smiling

native officers in white uniform came aboard. They looked exactly alike.

"We didn't mean to stop you," said Uncle Bill.

The officers grinned from ear to ear. One of them handed over a basket with three tins of meat, some fruit and a bottle of brandy. "Captain help you?" he said.

Uncle Bill thanked them heartily and sent David to fetch a tin of butter as a present to the captain.

"Thank you very much. Captain help you? Come aboard?" said the officers.

"We could ask to send Mother a radio message," said David. "I'm sure she'd like to know how we're getting on."

"Good idea. You can take it yourself." And between them they made up the following message: "SPLENDID VOYAGE. NEARING JOURNEY'S END SAFELY. VERY HOT WEATHER. DAVID WEARING WARMEST UNDERCLOTHES OF COURSE. LOVE FROM BILL AND DAVID."

The officers rowed David over. As he climbed up the railed companion-way, he felt as proud as an admiral going to inspect the fleet. The crowd on deck made way for him, staring with admiration.

"Captain Snimblesohn," announced the officer.

And at the foot of the bridge David met him.

He looked up at a thick pair of horn-rimmed glasses and a mane of black, flowing hair.

"That is my name, correct," said the captain in a strange accent, stretching out a hand. "Excuse my hand—it is greasy. I have been feeding my pigs."

David thought this an odd job for a captain, but he said nothing.

"You come with me to bridge, yes? We do business, yes? Mind the pigs."

Squeezing past a pen of pigs, they went up to the bridge.

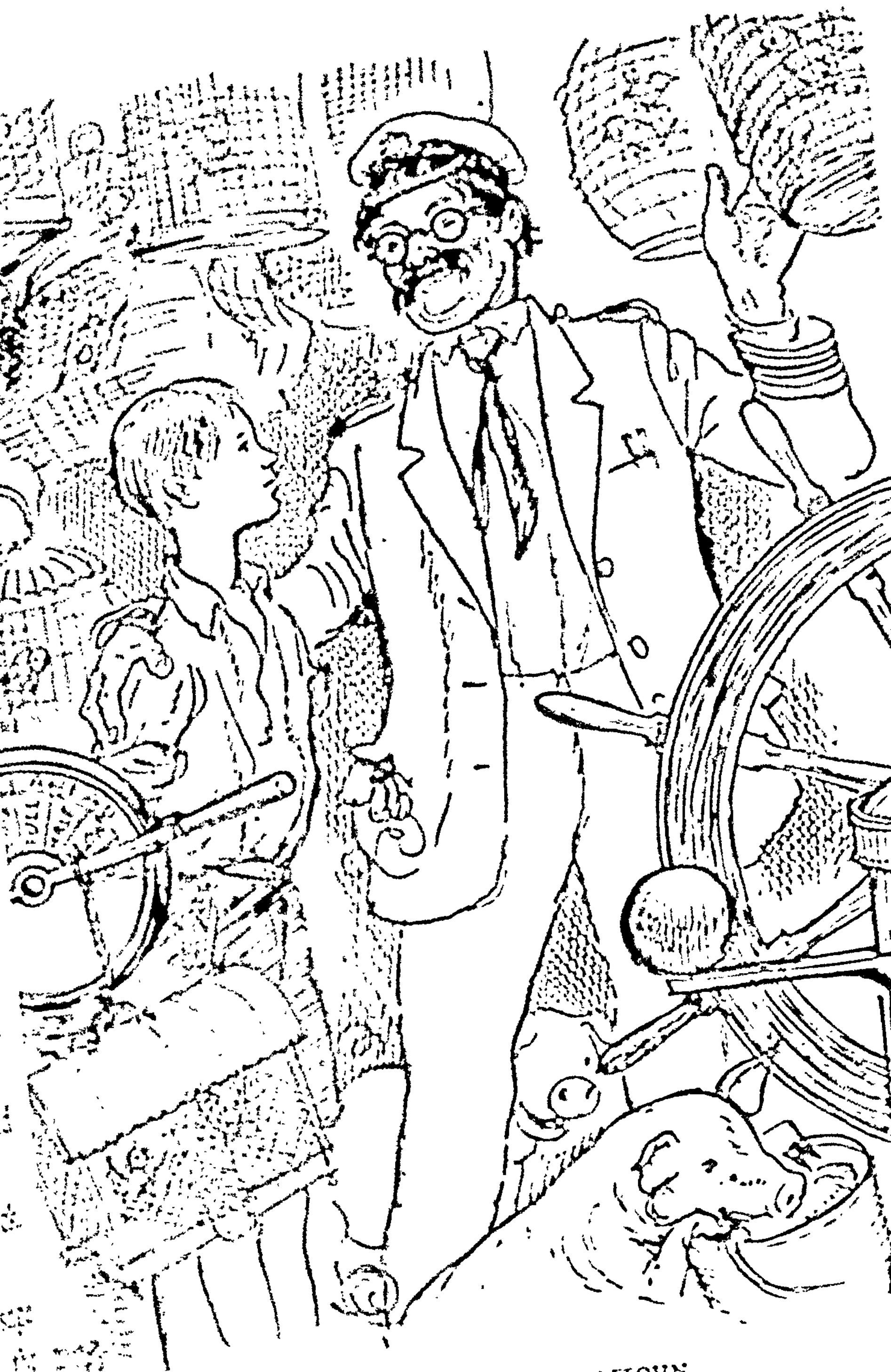
"I have a son like you, blue eyes, yes, like you, yes. Cabin boy on my ship. Alas, he is in hospital, Mango Island. Last trip he catch bad fever. I show you photo of him, yes? Mind the pigs."

The bridge was unlike anything David had imagined. It was filled with cage upon cage of humming birds. They were hanging on hooks in the most awkward places. The whole place smelt like a damp and sticky jungle.

"What do you do with them in a storm?" said David.

"Send them below, poor birds. Very sea-sick. Awful mess. I don't clear up myself."

While an officer went off with the radio message and the chronometer to have it checked, the



captain told David about his ship. She was a Portuguese and served the Cape Weird Islands as well as Jungle Island and the smaller ones round it.

Soon the officer returned with the chronometer (it had been three minutes slow) and the photo the captain had spoken of.

"Here is my son, so like you, so like you," said the captain.

David took the photo. He saw a boy of about his own age, playing leap-frog on board the steamer.

"Very fond of English games, my son is. Man he leaps over, good sport."

David looked at the man under the leaping boy and gave a start of surprise. He had seen that face before. It was Gascar's.

"When was this taken?" he asked, trying to hide his excitement.

"Last trip. About three weeks ago. He very good passenger, help me feed pigs. Land at Mango Island. You go now? What a pity, what a pity. This way, please. Mind the pigs."

When David was back on board *Winkle* and the two officers had returned to the ship, he told his uncle about the photo. He seemed neither surprised nor alarmed.

"I hadn't forgotten the scoundrel," he said. "I never expected him to give us a free run to the

treasure. It looks as if we're in for more excitement than your mother bargained for."

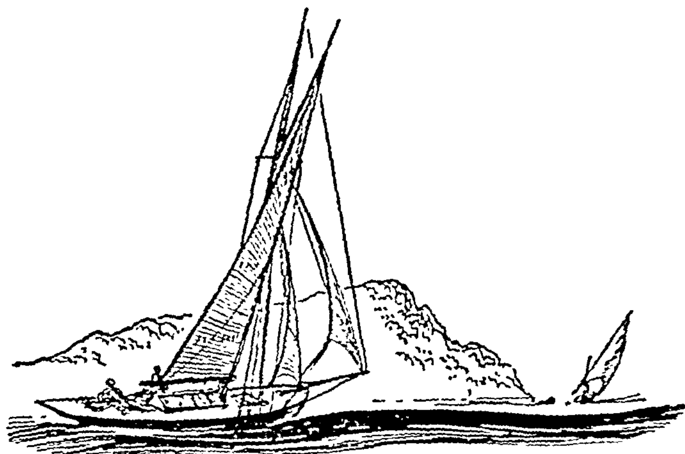
"Good."

"It's all right for you, lad. But *I* shall get the blame."

The steamer's engines started. With a churn of foam behind her she was moving now, her rail lined with waving passengers. On the bridge the captain was waving with one arm, a pig clutched under the other.

Winkle dipped her masthead flag in salute.

"Mind the pigs," said David, copying the captain's accent. And they both laughed.



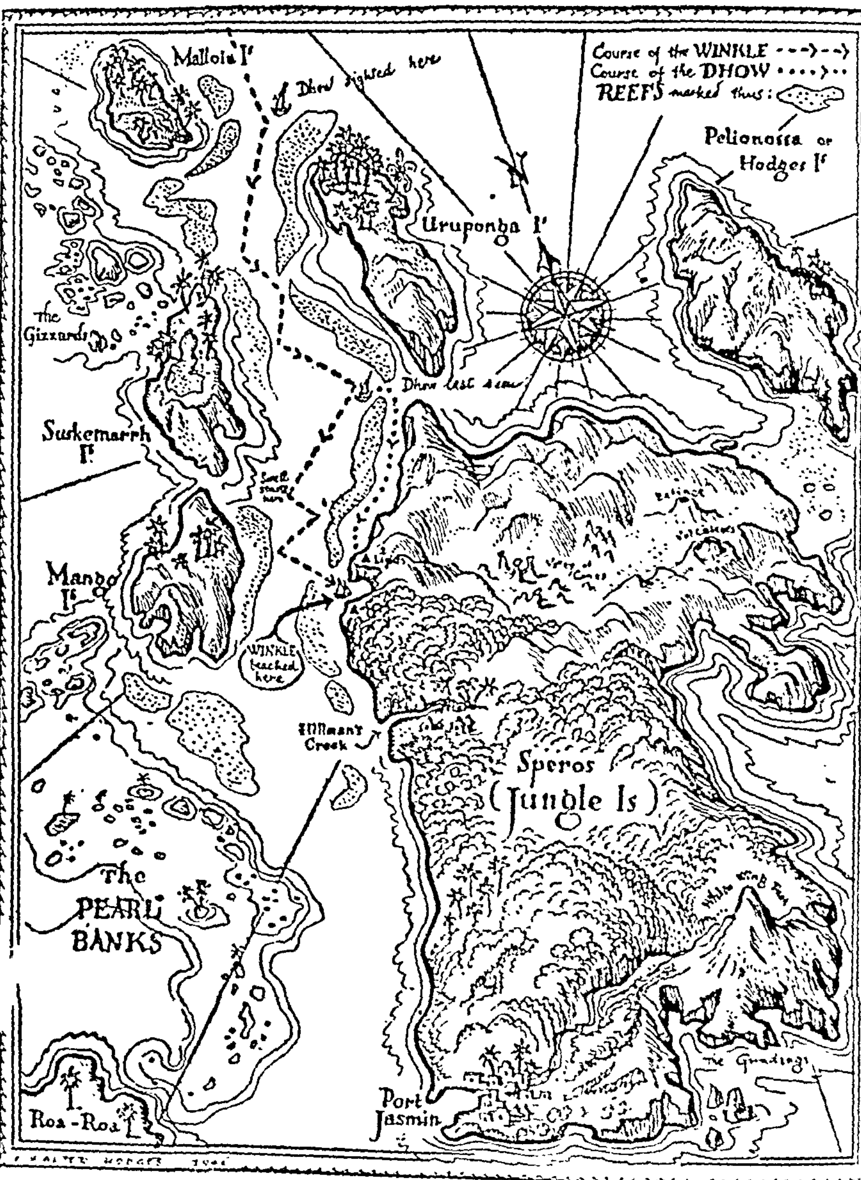
CHAPTER 4

NOT THE RIGHT WAY TO ARRIVE

On the next day they sighted their first reef. It was about as long as a cricket pitch, and ten coconut trees grew on it.

"Do let's land," said David. "Just for fun."

"And split our timbers on the bottom? No fear! There's nothing worse than coral for holing a boat. It's very shallow here, and from now on you must look out for reefs. Look for the places where the water is a different colour. That means a reef underneath."



MAP OF THE PERILOUS ISLANDS

But the dhow didn't want to be caught up. She kept well ahead.

The current became more tricky. Cross tides swept over the reefs. *Winkle* seemed to be tacking all the time.

That night they anchored in a lagoon. Tired with watching, David fell asleep quickly. But Uncle Bill could not sleep. He was worried by the way the sea pounded at the boat. He wondered if the cable would hold. Opening the charts which Captain Hardwick, his father's old explorer friend, had left him in his will, he looked at them carefully. The channel was too roughly marked to be much use. But Hillman's Creek on Jungle Island was clearly marked, as well as the reef openings there. In the margin was a pencil note saying that, when the pearl-fishing boats were out, beacon lights on each side of the creek were lit at night. If they made for the creek in daylight, they could take a pilot on board for the rest of the voyage. As far as he could make out, Hillman's Creek was not more than three days' sail away.

In the morning the dhow was no longer to be seen.

They sailed back into the channel. The current was very swift and dangerous. It swept them very fast past the towering cliffs of a new island—

Jungle Island, where the treasure was hidden. The cliffs were black and rather frightening.

About three o'clock they saw a huge opening in the reef. Early as it was, Uncle Bill decided to head for it and anchor in the lagoon beyond. But the current was stronger than he thought and swept them towards the reef. In vain he tried to tack out to sea again. Then there was a grating and crunching sound, and *Winkle* heeled over.

"We're stuck fast," said David, and his heart was beating fast.

They were wondering how to get her off, when suddenly she slipped off the spur and righted herself. Uncle Bill dived below deck to search for holed planks, but luckily there was no damage.

Later they drifted into a place where two seas met, sweeping down on them from gaps in the reef. An eddy caught them and whirled them on at a terrific rate. They were heartily thankful when in the evening they found some slack water and were able to anchor for the night. Uncle Bill would have liked to make for the creek beyond the reef, but by now it was too dark to see. The sky was starless, black as pitch. Except for sea sounds in the distance, all around them was very quiet.

"David, I left my jacket on deck. Fetch it for me, would you?"

A moment later David shouted from the deck. "Come here—something for you to see."

His uncle ran up and at once saw the cause of David's excitement—two flames were spurting from the darkness.

"Must be the beacons at Hillman's Creek," said David.

"Can't be them. The map says the Creek is a good sixty miles down the coast."

"I bet the map's wrong. Look, I can see people round the beacons. That near one is like a Guy Fawkes bonfire. I'm sure it's Hillman's Creek. Would it be safe to sail in, under power?"

"We stay here," said Uncle Bill, and they went below.

David lay down in his bunk, but he was too excited to sleep. Uncle Bill tried to read a book. But a swell had started—the water was slapping against the side and he was very worried. The cable was being tugged and jerked. Then suddenly something banged against the port side.

Uncle Bill hurried up on deck. He was just in time to see a pale shape alongside—was it some huge fish? Was it some driftwood that had fouled the cable and crashed into them? He ran below for his flashlamp.

When he returned and flashed the light on the

water, the shape had moved—away from the boat, backwards, *against* the current. The beam lit up what looked like a small dinghy.

"Who's there?" he shouted. He could see arms and paddles. They seemed to be paddling towards him, yet all the time the dinghy was dropping behind.

Then he realised what had happened. *Winkle* was moving. The cable no longer held her. The current was sweeping her into the darkness, towards the beacons on the cliff.

He ran below deck to start the engine. If only he could get her moving, there was still a chance to avoid the lee shore. Stumbling and tripping in the dark, he at last reached the engine. He tried desperately to start her. She refused to fire. He tried again, and again. It was no use. Was there still time to hoist sail?

He stumbled back on deck.

But it was too late now. An eddy had swung the boat right round and she was spinning like a top. Suddenly there was a grating sound.

"Are you all right, David?"

"All right," from David at the tiller.

More grating and splitting. They crouched down together by the tiller. *Winkle* had heeled over badly. She was skidding across the half-sunken

reefs, while the waves swept over them, drenching them to the skin. The beacons came closer and closer—huge flames raging in the darkness above them.

"Hold on, David. Don't let go."

She struck again, then skidded sickeningly across another reef into slack water beyond. Something hit the skylight. Water poured in.

"That's done for us," thought Uncle Bill. But all he said was, "We're very close to the shore, David. We may have to swim for it."

The current was quite gentle now, and they were drifting inshore. *Winkle* struck a reef just awash and lay there on her side, scraping idly. Uncle Bill found himself standing in the water, one arm grasping the rail, his feet on firm rock.

"That's the end of our voyage," he said sadly. "She's aground."

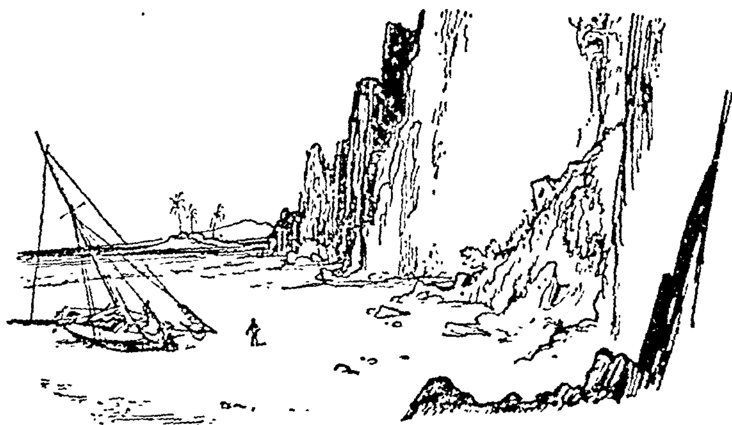
"Will we have to swim ashore?"

"Not unless she breaks up. It can't be long till dawn now."

He hoisted himself, dripping, on to the sloping deck.

"Poor old *Winkle*," he said.

It was chilly and they were both shivering.



CHAPTER 5

A NASTY SHOCK FOR DAVID

It was a cold and clammy dawn. As Uncle Bill looked up from where he lay, he saw huge black cliffs climbing into the sky. Strangely enough, there didn't seem to be any sea about. Leaving David asleep on deck, he went to have a look round.

Winkle had driven herself into the sand at the high-water mark. She lay on her side, and the sea was a good hundred yards away. Her lead keel was missing and the bronze bolts that held it secure

had snapped off near the wooden keel. The banging and scraping against the reefs had torn it clean off. Freed of this four-ton weight, *Winkle* had been drifted ashore by the tide. Luckily the total damage was slight. Mast and bowsprit were unbroken. The cabin with the smashed skylight was not badly awash. Apart from the messed rigging and the lost keel she was sound enough.

Uncle Bill began to clear the rigging, making such a noise about it that David woke up. When he put his foot to the ground, he found to his dismay he couldn't stand on it. It was so swollen that they had a job to get the boot off. The ankle was badly sprained, and David would not be able to get about for some days. Tearing an old shirt into strips, Uncle Bill bound it up, then carried him to the mouth of the bay where the sun was shining.

"You *have* been busy this morning," said David, noticing all the footmarks on the sand.

"They're not all mine."

"I suppose that means there's a village near and we'll soon be rescued."

"I'm not so sure about being rescued. You didn't see what I saw last night when I flashed my torch on the water. A boatload of natives messing with our cable."

"You don't mean it was foul play?"

"Of course it was. They filed a link through while we were in the cabin."

Laying the boy down on a sunny rock, he went back to the boat to clear up the mess and bale out the cabin. While he was doing this, David noticed the broken keel lying high and dry on a reef. He also saw three or four men appear round the point of the next bay. Uncle Bill saw them too and went off to meet them.

"Do be careful," called David. "They look like cannibals."

To his relief, they did not eat his uncle up. After a short exchange of noises, one of them went away, and the other two returned with Uncle Bill to David.

"I want them to help shore up *Winkle*," he explained to the boy. "She'll break up if she lies on her side for long. I've sent that fellow to fetch his pals—we shall want thirty at least."

Picking up David, he carried him to the boat, where they were soon joined by some thirty natives, all half-naked and unarmed. They quickly had *Winkle* righted and firmly shored up. Bill was pleased and offered them some tinned food, which they refused. From the pained expressions on their faces, they might have been offered poison.

"Perhaps they only eat people," said David.

"All the more for us," said Uncle Bill, and they sat down and emptied three tins of sardines between them. Meanwhile the natives stood in a circle on the beach, shouting and arguing.

"They're deciding which of us to eat first," said David.

"Then I hope they pick on you."

One of the natives came over and spoke to Uncle Bill. Unable to make him understand, he put his finger in his mouth, then pointed to the next bay.

"I think I'd better go along with them."

"Please don't go, uncle. It may be a trick to separate us."

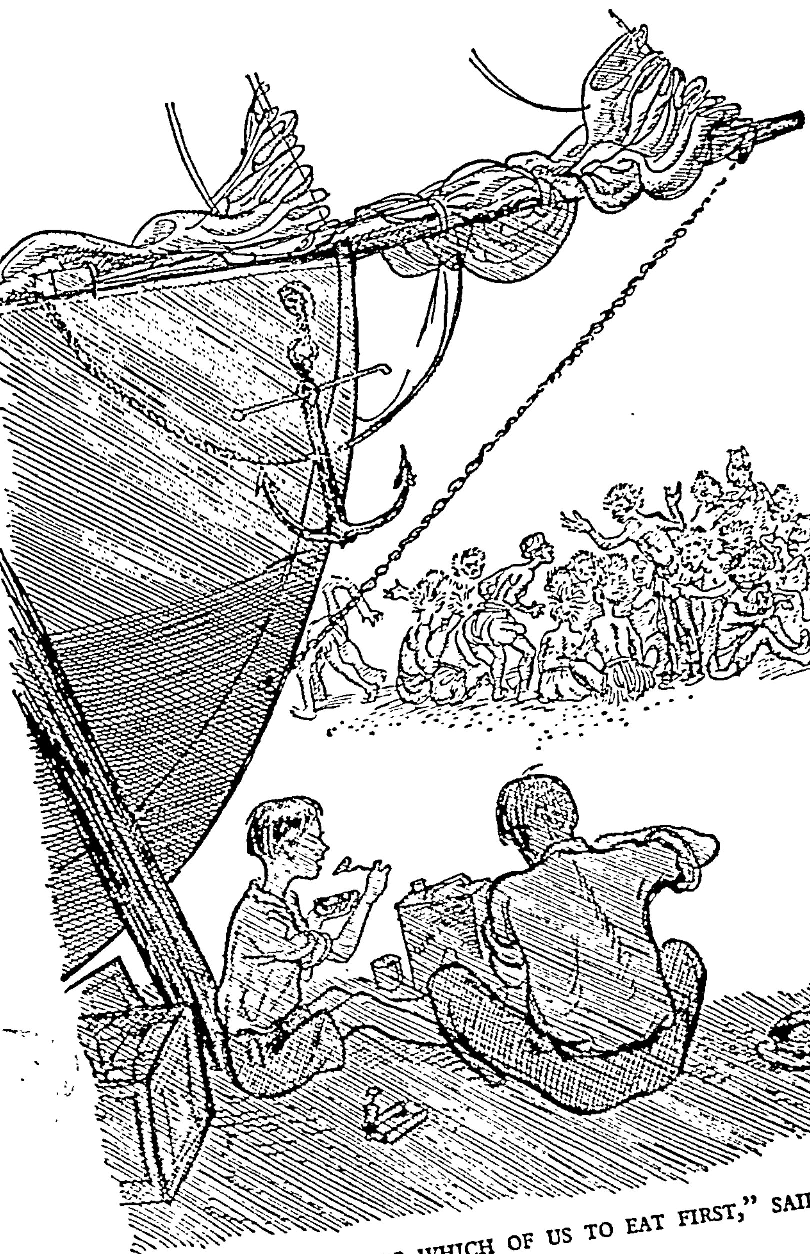
"They're quite friendly. If they'd wanted to kill us, they could have done so already. Two against thirty, what a hope!"

The half-hour of his uncle's absence was the most worrying David had ever spent. Alone in that strange bay, with the black ugly cliffs above and the tide slowly creeping up, he was filled with gloomy thoughts. It was a great relief when at last Uncle Bill returned.

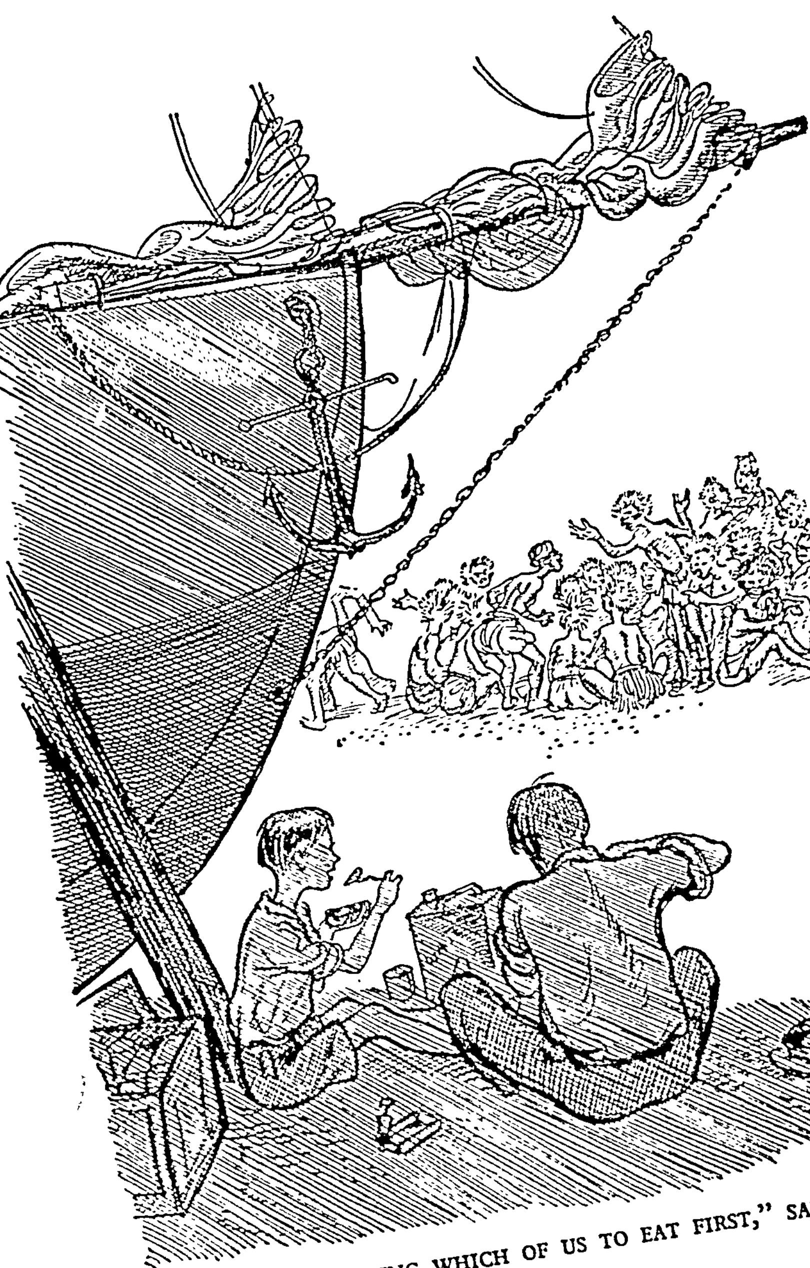
"A present for you," he said, throwing three juicy melons on the sand.

"From the village?"

"There isn't a village. The natives don't come



"THEY'RE DECIDING WHICH OF US TO EAT FIRST," SAI



“THEY’RE DECIDING WHICH OF US TO EAT FIRST,” SA

heavily, and David hobbled on board and into the cabin.

He looked through the porthole towards the point, but rain was streaming down the glass. He forced it open—and noticed a movement. A cloaked figure was coming towards the boat. "Uncle!" he cried. "Thank goodness they've lent him a mackintosh."

Hobbling to the cabin door, he found it jammed. He was still struggling with it when a loud knock on the door surprised him. Suddenly the door opened.

The figure in the doorway shook the rain from his thick, wavy hair. He unbuttoned his cloak and quietly shut the door.

"Gascar!" cried David.

The man grinned. He was naked to the waist. A green snake was tattooed on his chest, the head lifted to strike.

"Where's my uncle?"

"Safe on board the dhow," sneered Gascar. "Yes, it was my dhow that brought you here, my men that helped you shore up *Winkle*. Very kind of them, wasn't it? But you needn't worry. Uncle's quite safe."

There was a short silence.

"What are you waiting for?" said David. "I'm ready to come with you."

When David had recovered from the shock of Gascar's visit, he tried to follow him, hobbling along the sand. But the effort was too painful, and he had to give up. He tried to swim to the mouth of the bay, but the current forced him back.

Later, as he lay on the beach watching the open sea, he saw the dhow tack across the lagoon past the reef. The figures on board were too tiny to see.

More rain. Sadly and painfully he made his way back to *Winkle*, thinking of all the tortures that Uncle Bill might be suffering. He made himself some supper, then lay down on his bunk and at last fell asleep.

He had a very strange dream. He was back in England in a country train. Though it stopped at lots of stations, nobody got in or out—he was the only passenger. Suddenly the carriage door opened and in walked Gascar. "You realise that you are at my mercy," he sneered. Stretching out his cruel hands, he gripped the boy by the shoulders and shook him. "Let me go, let me go!" cried David —and opened his eyes.

The figure was still above him, real arms were touching him. Someone was looking down at him where he lay in his bunk.

But it was not Gascar.



CHAPTER 6

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

The face of a stranger, lean, bearded, with a mass of untidy hair, was looking down on him. Dark and sunburnt, it was not quite the face of a native.

"English?" asked the stranger. "I thought so. The name of your boat told me that."

Rubbing his eyes, David asked, "Are you English too? You speak well."

The stranger smiled but said nothing.

"My name's David," said the boy.

"Mine's Kory Marteen. Have you hurt your foot? Ah, a bad twist. You will let me rub it for you?"

With his strong hands he began to ease out the stiffness, while David told him of the shipwreck, of Gascar and his uncle's kidnap. At the mention of Gascar's name, a dark gleam flashed in Kory's eye. But it passed quickly. David asked if he knew him. The stranger stared stonily at him and did not answer. All he would say was that he lived by himself somewhere behind the cliff and that he came down to the beach to catch fish. Then he invited him to come and stay with him until his foot was better.

David did not hesitate. Somehow he felt that he could trust this man. So they made a pile of all he wanted to take—food, clothes, the copies of Captain Hardwick's maps—and set off for his home.

"I'd never have guessed there was a way up the cliff," said David, bobbing up and down on Kory's back. "It looks quite sheer from below."

They passed a waterfall with a thirty-foot drop. They climbed up steps cut in the rock. Then they passed through some jungle dark as a tunnel and came out into the sunshine.

"This is where I live," said Kory.

In front of him David saw an astonishing sight



THE VALLEY OF CONES

—a valley of cones or pointed rocks with holes in them, and mountains in the distance. On the top of each cone was a small slab of rock. Kory explained that centuries ago a volcano had poured ash and lava into this valley, swamping the jungle. These cones were all that was left. The hard lava slabs on top protected the softer stone underneath. The holes had been made thousands of years ago by the natives who had lived here. Now nobody lived in them except himself and the birds.

Kory's home was one of the finest. It was smooth and steep (rather like a lighthouse) and had three doors or windows hollowed out. The lowest, ten foot from the ground, was reached by steps carved in the rock. With Kory's help David managed to haul himself up to it.

He found himself in a cool room, like a hermit's cell. The only furniture was a table, two chairs, a fire-pot and a fuel-box. Two beds had been carved out of the rock wall. There was a hole in the far wall and outside it a small hanging garden, full of growing things—onions, radish and fennel.

In this strange house David lived for a fortnight while his ankle was healing. He grew very fond of his new friend, who looked after him like a son and did everything to make him happy and not worry about Uncle Bill.

"I hope we shall find him at Hillman's Creek. It is only four days from here on foot. I know a secret path through the jungle," said Kory.

He showed great interest in all to do with Gascar. He wanted to know about Gascar's visit to England, and David told him all he knew. But when David asked Kory about himself—why had he chosen to live such a lonely life?—he got no real answer. A sad look came into his eyes and he said, "I wish to live alone. I cannot tell you my reasons." He was a man of mystery and looked as if he had at some time suffered deeply.

At last the time came when David could walk without too much pain, and they set off through the jungle for Hillman's Creek. All day they followed the narrow path, sometimes hacking their



way through undergrowth. Kory shot wild-fowl and David cooked it for supper with the herbs they had gathered. At night they lay curled up round their camp fire.

The fourth day was dreadful. Hack, hack, hack at the scrub around and overhead. Their shoulders ached. They were always stooping. Roots tripped their feet. David was very glad when at last they reached the edge of a deep ravine, which Kory said was the beginning of the Creek. They followed the steep path, keeping their eyes off the river swirling hundreds of feet below. Towards evening the ravine widened, and they saw the first huts of Hillman's Creek.

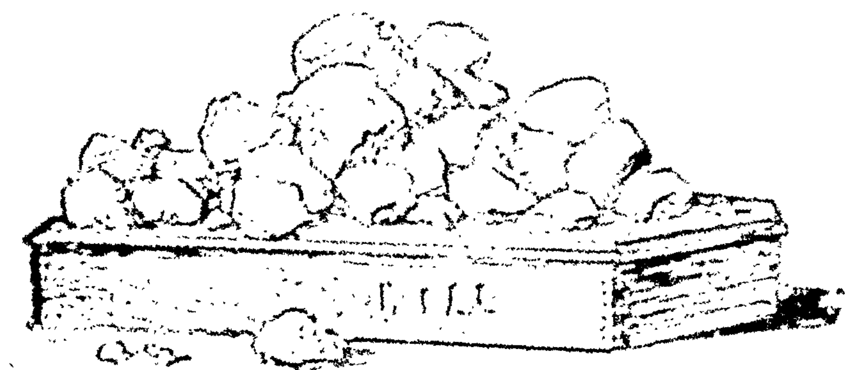
Kory sat down by a small cave.

"You must stay hidden here, David. I shall go myself into the village and find out all I can."

"How long will you be?" said David anxiously. He was thinking of how he had lost Uncle Bill.

"I promise to be back before dark. Don't move from here. I am leaving everything with you, my rifle too. No, there is no need to use it. You are safe if you do as I tell you. Goodbye."

He climbed over the rock and disappeared.



CHAPTER 7

TOO LATE FOR THE FUNERAL

The branches parted, there was a scraping of nails on rock, and Kory was back again.

"I'm so glad you've come," said David. "There's some cold duck for supper. I didn't think it safe to light a fire."

"I've brought two melons," said Kory.

"And good news, I hope?"

Kory's face was grim.

"Tell me quickly—what's the news?"

"I've brought these water melons," he said. Then with an effort he added, "The news is bad. Your uncle is dead. He was buried ten days ago." Kory cut off a wing of duck and handed it to him.

"I don't want to eat anything," said David.

Kory laid a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry, boy. I wish I had some comfort to offer."

Never had David felt so depressed. The sky grew dark as they sat together in silence. Then they spread their sleeping-bags side by side on the cold rock and went to sleep.

Next morning over breakfast Kory told him more. "When I left you I went straight to the house of Simiona, a man I know well. He lives by the stone jetty, where the dhows unload. He saw Gascar land from his dhow, leading the white man with his hands bound behind him and a rope end round his neck. Gascar told the people your uncle was a murderer. He had thrown two of the crew to the sharks."

"He isn't a murderer," said David. "He might have lost his temper with them, but he wouldn't throw them to the sharks."

"That we cannot judge," said Kory. "But Simiona did what he could to save your uncle. He remembered Gascar as a young man among the pearl-divers. He had robbed Simiona's father of his pearls and then fled abroad. But the crew of Gascar supported what he said, and your uncle was taken to his death."

"I hope it was a quick death."

"The death of a murderer is not happy. In Jungle Island murderers are buried alive."

David cried out in horror.

"Across the Creek," said Kory. "Inside the Hill of Tombs. Murderers are buried apart from the rest. They buried him there on the night of the full moon."

"How long do you think a buried man can live?"

"A few minutes, perhaps an hour or two."

"Uncle Bill was very strong. Couldn't he have lasted longer?"

"I hope not, for his sake."

"He might have escaped."

"I'm afraid not. Here they always screw down the coffin and weight it with stones."

"Is it dug into the earth?"

"No. It is laid in a long tunnel, on a ledge of murderers' coffins."

There was something at the back of David's mind that made him ask these questions. Was it possible that . . .?

But Kory was speaking. "Simiona heard your uncle speak to the crowd before he died. He told them that in England it was the custom for murderers to build their own coffins and carve their names on them. Then the God of the Dead would know them when they reached the place of spirits.

Your uncle asked them to let him build his own coffin."

Suddenly David leapt into the air. "I say, did he really make his own coffin?"

Kory was astonished at his excitement. "Of course the coffin was inspected. There was no trickery."

But David knew Uncle Bill better than Kory. He knew him to be not only a clever carpenter but a conjurer too. When he was not away sailing and exploring, his hobby was conjuring.

"We must go at once and find the coffin," said David.

"All right. But you must wait till dark."

"Does that mean Gascar's still hanging about?"

"He left with his crew after the burial—more than a week ago. But we must wait till dark. We must not be seen tampering with the dead. The natives are afraid of the ghosts in the Hill of Tombs and will not go near at night."

So they borrowed a small boat from Simiona and paddled across the Creek as soon as it was dark.

Not a star was in the sky as they toiled up to the Hill of Tombs. When they were out of sight of the village, they lit a torch. It spluttered and showered sparks into the darkness.

They came to the entrance of the tombs. Kory

held the torch high above his head. Huge figures with ghastly faces crowded round them.

"Don't be scared—they're not real," said Kory. "Only made of stone."

"No wonder the natives daren't come here after dark," said David, shuddering. "I *am* glad you're here too, Kory. What a horrid place to be buried alive in!"

"Mind your head, David. This is the entrance to the tunnel."

It was cold and clammy. Every word they spoke echoed from end to end.

"How shall we know which coffin it is?"

"It must be the last and farthest," said Kory. "These coffins we are passing are hundreds of years old."

With bent shoulders they hurried along—to the last coffin of all.

"Here it is," said Kory, running his hand over it. "The wood is full of knots."

"Some lettering here," said David. "Hold the torch close . . . B—I—L—L. It *is* his. I say, let's get the lid off quick."

But it would have taken a week to raise that lid. It was weighted with stones right to the roof of the tunnel.

"Try the panel," said Kory. "It may unhinge."

They tried, but it stayed firm.✓

"Uncle Bill, are you inside?" cried David, his mouth close to the panel. He beat it with his fists.

"Stop," said Kory. "He's answered you."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen," said Kory. With his fist he gave the panel a hearty bang which echoed down the tunnel. "Hollow as a tube. If there was someone inside, it wouldn't echo like that."

"We'd better make sure," said David. But, try as he might, he couldn't shift the panel.

Then Kory tried. He pressed each knot with his thumbs. One close to the foot of the coffin gave way. Putting his finger in, he stroked the wood inside gently. There was a click and the panel opened. He lifted it to the ground.

"It's empty!" shouted David. Jumping for joy, he banged his head against the tunnel roof.

"Not quite empty." Kory handed him a sheet of paper. "A message for you."

Sitting on the cold floor of the tunnel, by the torchlight David unfolded a grubby sheet and read: " 'Hope you can read this—have had paper screwed up in my hand and the pencil's only a stub. They buried me naked in this coffin which I made myself. I had chosen knotty wood. While they bumped me up the hill in it, I was more

comfortable than they thought. I lifted a knot in the bottom panel near my nose, so I could breathe. They buried me and left. I got out by slipping the panel. In the dark I felt my way out. I found one of the natives who had helped to bury me lying dead drunk on the hill. I stripped him and took his clothes. Hid myself all night and day. Next night went to Simiona, wanted boat to find you, David. No luck. Simiona away. Daren't move by day, eyes everywhere. No more paper left . . . Must find you, David. To *Winkle* soon.' "

"I hope he hasn't gone back to *Winkle*," said David. "Hey, what are you doing with that light?"

Kory had taken the torch and was looking into the coffin. "Here's something else. A bit of bark." He gave it to David.

There was some writing on it: "Have tried for boat going north. No luck. All pearl boats go south to Jasmin. Must stow away soon, daren't be seen here. Daren't wait for Simiona to come back. Hope you're safe. Meet you at Jasmin. Bill."

"He must have written it later and slipped it in," said Kory.

"I'm so glad he did. We've simply got to catch him up. You'll come with me, won't you, Kory?"

Kory smiled. "I shall stay with you till we find him."



CHAPTER 8

WASHED UP BY THE TIDE?

Four days later Simiona's dhow left Hillman's Creek for Port Jasmin. On board was a cargo of sharks' fins, dried fish and wild honey, also pearls from the pearl beds to sell to traders. Apart from the crew there were two passengers—Kory and David.

As the dhow set sail, the crew went about their duties singing a rousing song. Every man knew his note and his job, and they were quickly away. Simiona the captain was tall, thin and dignified.

He spent most of the time sitting on the platform at the stern, talking in an earnest voice to Kory. When he was asked if he had any news of Uncle Bill, he said no. But a dhow had left for Port Jasmin a week before, and he might have hidden himself among the cargo on deck.

David made a new friend on board—the cook. His name was Shinko. He was of slave origin, heavily built, with a deep voice and a head that was bald except for two hairs. He was nearly always grinning. His galley was in the bows, where he had set up a brazier fire and a pole above it from which hung the cooking-pots. He spent most of the time making strange mixtures for the next meal. Bread-fruit paste cooked in coconut milk was one of David's favourites.

David learnt that Shinko had once cooked for an old friend of Captain Hardwick's, named Jonathan Pearce. Mr. Pearce and his daughter Carole lived in Port Jasmin. Captain Hardwick had mentioned them in his papers, telling Uncle Bill to be sure to call on them for help and information about the treasure. "Mighty good holy man Mista Pearce, him American," was how Shinko described him.

Kory kept a watchful eye on David. But after the evening call to prayer, when all the crew gathered at the stern to sing, he always spent an



HE ALWAYS SPENT AN HOUR TALKING TO SIMIONA

hour talking to Simiona. David wondered what they were saying, for mixed up with their foreign words he often caught the name of Gascar.

"What were you saying about Gascar?" he asked once.

"We were speaking of the past," said Kory, "when Gascar worked with the divers and robbed them."

"Did he own a dhow himself?"

"He did."

"What was the crime that drove him from the island?"

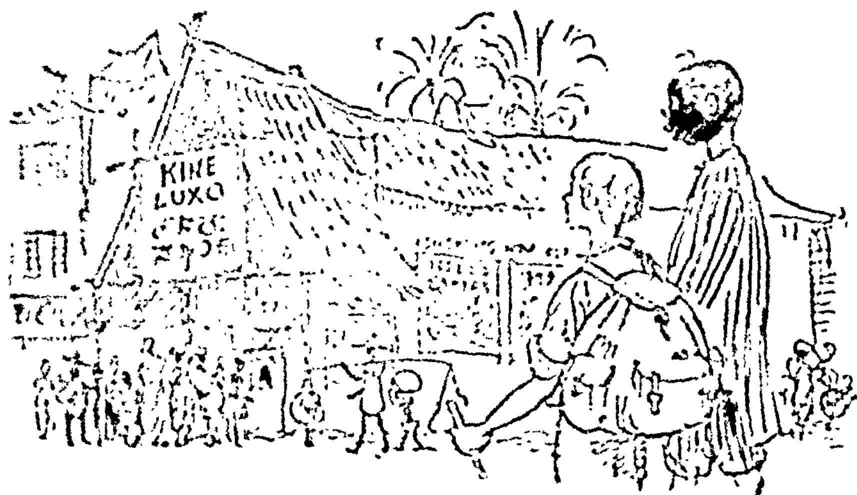
"It is a long tale," said Kory sadly and mysteriously. "I cannot tell you now."

After this he was careful not to mention Gascar when David was about. Only once again did David catch the name. Kory was explaining in English about the hard life of the pearl-divers. "But they are paid better now than they used to be. Ever since Gascar sank the dhow, they . . ." He broke off with an awkward laugh and added, "I wonder what's in Shinko's frying-pan." And he went off to see.

At last they reached Port Jasmin. As they sailed into the bay, passing steamers, dhows and yachts riding at anchor, David became excited. Somewhere in the neat modern port Uncle Bill might

be hiding. It was up to David now to find him. And where was Gascar? Was he already hurrying inland after the treasure? Did he know about Uncle Bill's escape?

When they landed, Kory went off with Simiona to the trading place, while Shinko went off with David to Mr. Pearce's house. Before separating,



they fixed a time for Kory, David and Shinko to meet later at the jetty.

Mr. Pearce's house was on the beach well outside the town. To get there they had to walk along the Street of Shops, a broad street lined with bread-fruit trees. The shops were full of food—lotus root, cabbage, soya beans, millet, and all kinds of fruit. In the meat shops whole hogs hung by the neck, and behind them were many rows of

ducks and fowl. Sitting on the pavement, natives with shining teeth sold sweets and nuts. David felt very hungry, but Shinko would not let him stop.

At the end of the street they passed a strange building made of rusty iron and thin board. The film posters outside showed that this was the cinema. A very thrilling film was advertised to begin at 6.30 p.m.

"That's Mista Pearce's house over there," said Shinko, when they came to the beach. He pointed to a wooden house standing by itself on stilts.

Could Uncle Bill be inside? Very excited, David ran across the sand as fast as he could go, with Shinko close on his heels. A lady came out on to the veranda. She knew Shinko and seemed pleased to see him. "Tell me," she said, "who is the youngster you've brought with you?"

"I'm David," said the boy shyly.

"And I'm Carole Pearce," she smiled. "You're very welcome."

"I've come for Uncle Bill if you've got him."

Miss Pearce looked quite blank.

"Bill Langton," said David, his heart beginning to sink. "Surely he's been here?"

"Few people come here, it's so far from the town. I'm sure I know nobody of that name."

David sat on the steps and explained who Uncle Bill was, trying hard to hold back tears of disappointment.

"I think I know who you mean now," said Miss Pearce. "He must be the son of Alexander Langton, my father's friend. He and my father were friends of Captain Hardwick, who learnt the secret of King Thanasis' treasure from my father. They always intended to go for the treasure together. But Alexander died and my father became ill. I believe Captain Hardwick got some of the way there on his own——"

"And he had to give up," finished David. "But he left all his papers and maps to Uncle. That's why we've come here—to search for the treasure. It's going to be a race, and there's no time to waste. But I can't possibly start till Uncle Bill turns up."

"I quite see that," said Miss Pearce. "From what you tell me he must be about somewhere, and you shall stay here till he turns up. Poor lad, you *do* need looking after." She was staring at his torn clothes with amusement.

"I've got another shirt in my rucksack," said David, "but I forgot to put it on." He felt ashamed of his ragged shirt and soleless shoes and torn trousers.

"This is your home while you're in Jasmin," she said kindly. "And, Shinko, you must stay too. Nobody can cook like you. Come inside, both of you. Be as quiet as you can, as my father is sleeping. He's a very old man, you know."

David changed his clothes and had a wash and brush-up, while Shinko got busy in the kitchen. Then David slipped out on to the beach to begin his search for Uncle Bill.

He walked towards the town.

After a few paces something said to him, "You've been this way once. Why not try the other way?"

So he turned about and walked in the opposite direction.

Except for a few fishing boats high and dry, the beach was almost empty. There were plenty of crabs and starfish and sparkling shells. Soon Mr. Pearce's house was a speck in the distance. Following an urge which he could not understand, David went on.

Then suddenly he saw something lying up against a rock. Something washed up by the tide? Closer, he saw it was a man, oddly dressed, sleeping in the sun.

Tip-toe he went and tapped him on the shoulder. The man was very tired and did not move.

"A splash of water," thought David, and he ran to the edge of the sea and cupped his hands to catch a wave. He spilt most of it on the way back, but there was just enough left for him to wake up Uncle Bill.

"Shivering corkscrews, if it isn't my own David!" he cried. And Uncle Bill's arms were round him, hugging him like the arms of a great octopus.

CHAPTER 9

UNCLE BILL'S STORY

They sat happily together on the rock while Uncle Bill told David all that had happened to him after he escaped from the coffin.

"In Hillman's Creek I found a dhow which was due to sail to Port Jasmin. I stowed away on her the night before she sailed, lying cramped in the sail locker. We had been at sea a day when a native thought he'd like a change of sail and found me before the sail. Did I scare him? I shouted at him, and off he fled yelling to the captain."

"Did he know you?"

"Of course. They all knew me as the white man they had just buried—or rather his ghost. They were much more scared of me than I was of them. Except the captain. He was a brave man, the only one who didn't treat me as a ghost. Gathering the crew round him, he talked to them about me. I didn't understand their words, but it was clear that some of them wanted to throw me to the sharks. But the captain was suggesting something else, I

don't know what. While they were arguing, I had a brainwave. I was up in the bows where the galley is. There were some knives lying about, and I picked up the sharpest I could see."

"And sliced up the crew?"

"No, only a piece of melon rind. I shaped it into three little men and hid them on me. Then I let out a yell. The group broke up and came towards me. When they were quite close, I started conjuring, to attract their attention. You remember that trick I used to do with half a dozen cards, making them appear from nowhere? Well, I made these little men appear from the air, from the sails, from my mouth, behind my ears, between my toes, anywhere. They watched in amazement. The trick was a success. I made their simple minds think I had come from the spirit world—or at least I was a magician and best left alone."

"I'm glad they didn't throw you to the sharks."

Uncle Bill laughed. "I threw myself to the sharks instead."

"What do you mean?"

"Only that I killed a shark. When we got to the pearl banks on the way to Jasmin, I saved a diver from a shark. I saw it before him, dived, and struck the white belly with my knife as it shot past. I held on and was dragged through the water. I cut a long

slit in the belly—the shark really did it, by the speed of its rush. After that I was quite a hero. Everyone was friendly. By the time we got to Jasmin I was so pleased with myself that I got careless and never noticed that in Jasmin harbour . . . But I'm going ahead too fast.

"As a parting present the captain gave me a pearl. I sold it for twenty-five shillings and treated myself to a good meal and a one-and-sixpenny seat at the cinema. The big picture had started when I went in. I felt my way to a seat. The place was as stuffy as my coffin and, to make it worse, I sat down next to a strong smell. If the film hadn't been so thrilling, I couldn't have stuck it. At last it was over, and when the lights went up I saw that the smell next to me was—Gascar."

David gave a cry of excitement.

"He was more shocked than I was. But he recovered quickly and asked me calmly what I was doing out of my coffin. I told him I had found it too hot and had slipped out for a breather. Then I rushed for the door.

"Leaping over the seats, I was the first away. I made straight for the harbour, hoping to hide among the goods on the jetty. I couldn't have chosen a worse place. Tied to the jetty, with the serpent flag at the mast, was Gascar's dhow. Later

I learnt it had been there some days, but I'd been too blind to notice.

"I found somewhere to hide and crouched among a lot of sacks for an hour. Then I crept out and slipped over the harbour wall. Someone told me where Mr. Pearce's house was and I made for it as quickly as I could, for it was nearly dark.

"But one of Gascar's crew was sitting on the beach, on guard. He shouted and ran after me. Others joined him. I made for the coconut palms. These and the sudden coming of darkness saved me. I hid there safely till dawn, when I tried again to get to Mr. Pearce's. But that devil Gascar had posted his men all round the house and it wasn't safe to go near. To cut a long story short, I decided to go into the hills. About a mile outside the town gate I found another hiding-place—in a tall tree. From here I could see the harbour as well as the track leading into the hills."

"You mean the track that leads to White Wing Peak and the treasure?"

"Yes, the track that Gascar was bound to take when he started. I built a platform in the fork of the tree high above the track and lived here for a week. From here I saw Gascar's dhow leave the harbour two mornings ago. From here I saw Gascar and eight natives, all on mules, pass along

the track underneath me. That was yesterday morning."

"Why didn't you go to Mr. Pearce's yesterday?"

"I wanted to be sure Gascar had left nobody behind to spy on me. So I waited till today. And if I hadn't cracked my head climbing down the tree and made myself dizzy, I should have been at Mr. Pearce's before you. Now, David, it's your turn to tell me how *you* got here."

"A man named Kory——" David began. Then suddenly he remembered the time he had fixed to meet him on the jetty. Looking at his watch, he saw he should have been there half an hour ago.

But Kory was a patient man. Late though they were, he greeted them with a smile. David introduced his uncle.

"So the dead body has come to life," said Kory. "It seems you won't need my help any more now."

"Oh yes we will," said David and Uncle Bill both at once.

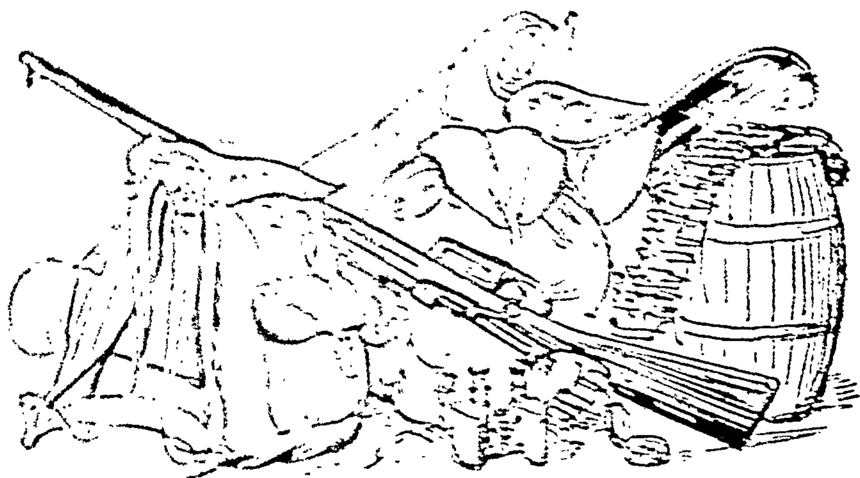
"The lad has been telling me all you have done for him," said Uncle Bill. "I don't know how to begin to thank you. I hardly like to ask you to face more dangers and discomforts——"

"We can't do without him," David broke in.

"If we're to race Gascar to the treasure, we shall need all the help we can get."

"I am willing to come if you want me," said Kory simply.

And they went to the cinema to celebrate.



CHAPTER 10

THE TREASURE PARTY LEAVES

Mr. Pearce was very old and crippled, and he could not get about except in a wheeled chair. He knew more than any other living person about the treasure of King Thanasis, buried in the caves of White Wing Peak. He also knew much about the country round about the Peak. But, like many old people, he had a habit of rambling on and on, and Uncle Bill found it hard to keep him to the point. He was very helpful about the damage to *Winkle*. He knew a firm which would see to the repairs and said that Uncle Bill could safely leave the matter in his

hands. When he returned with the treasure, *Winkle* would be waiting for him in Jasmin Harbour. This was a great relief to Uncle Bill.

Kory was also very helpful. As he understood the natives and their language, much of the work was left to him. He chose the native porters himself and bought the mules, food, clothes and medicine needed. David was messenger and did the fetching and carrying for everyone. He was sent to the town shops three or four times a day. Kory told him always to bargain with the natives and never to pay more than half of what they asked. Once he went for a haircut and beat the barber down from a shilling to sixpence. When he got back to the house, he was told that only half his head had been cut, and he had to go back and pay another sixpence for the job to be finished.

By Saturday morning all was ready. At ten o'clock the party met on the veranda of Mr. Pearce's house. Bill was the boss, with Kory as second-in-command. Shinko was cook, and David chief bottle-washer. There were seven native porters, including their leader Tarara. They were all naked except for loin-cloths. Their chests, legs and arms were tattooed with magnificent designs. Tarara's design showed that he was a very big swell indeed. It was of a bread-fruit tree, which began at



TARARA—A VERY BIG SWELL

his heels, climbed up his legs, and branched out into leaves on his body. He was indeed a splendid savage of a man. One side of his face was painted yellow, the other side red. He had a black beard and moustache, and his hair stood up on end as if it had had an electric shock. Three long wooden pins stuck out of his hair—he used these for scratching.

So the expedition set off. Mr. Pearce and Carole waved to them from the veranda, and a large crowd followed them as far as the town gate. Many children in the crowd had pop-guns made from bamboo canes. From these they shot beads, berries, peas and pips at the adventurers as they rode by on their mules. Some of the children flew kites, which got tangled in the trees.

"That's the tree where I spent my week of watching," said Uncle Bill, pointing to some branches above him.

It was exactly six days since Gascar and his party, bound for the treasure, had passed under the same tree.

During the first days several things went wrong. They had not gone far when Uncle Bill's mule stumbled and threw him into a prickly cactus bush. This was very painful, as well as undignified. Instead of helping to get him out, the natives roared

The weather was good and the track easy to follow. All they had to do was to follow the traces of Gascar's party. In the first three days they gained half a day's journey on them. Beyond the Crags of King Thanasis there was thick jungle, which Gascar would have to hack his way through. So they hoped to gain a great deal faster on him then.

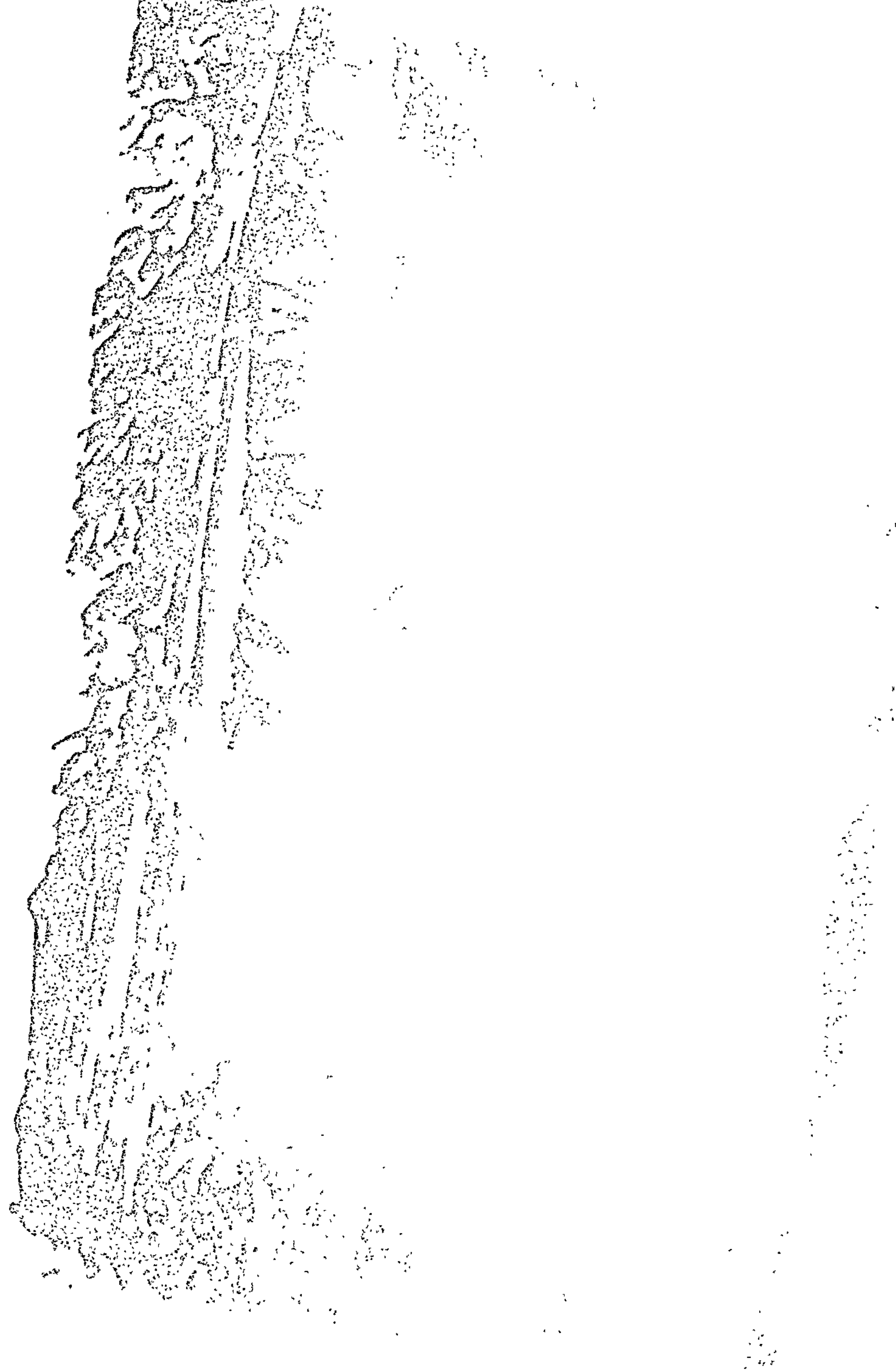
For many days the track lay along a dried-up watercourse with sandy cliffs on either side. There was no shade and it was very hot. They were glad when at last they reached the cool of the forest. Here were trees of every shape and size. The tallest were coconut palms, with long wavy leaves. Then there was the bread-fruit tree with golden fruit, and the banyan tree, which has so many stems that it looks like a small forest.

They lived off the land as much as possible, shooting pigeons and ducks. Kory was the best shot, so he did most of the shooting. The food carried by the pack-mules was not to be used till after they passed the Crags, where the country was more barren. Shinko knew all the tree roots which could be eaten and where to find them. The bread-fruit was a great help to him. It could be mixed to a paste and cooked in coconut milk. Or it could be roasted in the fire ashes like a potato. The forest had no cows in it, so the milk of the coconut had to

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do instead. Drunk straight out of the nut, it was as refreshing as an ice cream soda.

One night the whole party except Kory were sitting round the camp fire, stretching their hands towards the blaze. They had got wet through in a storm, and steaming clothes were hanging on branches and sticks to dry. Shinko was giving David a lesson in the native language. Suddenly David felt a tap on his shoulder. It was Kory.

"Come with me, David," he said quietly.

David followed him into the dark.

"Hold on to my belt if you can't see. One of the mules is ill. I want your help."

"What's wrong with him?"

"Colic, stomach pain. Must have eaten something that didn't agree. And he's got a flint in his cannon-bone. I must get it out and put a dressing on—some mash paste and boiling water. Will you stay with him while I make the paste? I want you to see that he doesn't roll."

They had reached the place where the mules were tied up. The light from Kory's torch showed one of them lying on the ground, his legs drawn up into his stomach.

"He'd squash me if I tried to stop him rolling. Wouldn't it be better to fetch a native?"

"I don't want them to know. If he starts to roll,

shout for me. Rolling knots the stomach and he may die."

While Kory was gone, David sat shivering in the darkness. Soon Kory came back. With a pair of pincers he pulled out a hard, sharp thorn from the bone.

"That fellow Tarara," said Kory, as he put on the dressing. "He's been out of temper all day. I think we're going to run into some trouble with him."

"I saw him sharpening his knife this morning," said David.

Kory smiled grimly.

The mule was better in the morning. Kory thought it wise to give him a light day, so they changed his pack to David's mule and told David to share with Uncle Bill. They did a full day's journey and camped an hour before sunset. Kory attended to the mule at once and left it feeding quite happily.

But he was anything but pleased with the behaviour of the natives. All of them were restless and bad-tempered. Tarara had been disobedient. e had refused to unload the mules and walked off.

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Suddenly there was a terrible cry in the night.

Some living creature was in agony. The natives thought it a wonderful joke and roared with laughter.

"Where's Kory gone?" said David, seeing an empty place beside him.

"Come with me, David," said Bill.

They found Kory bending over a mule that was lying on the ground. After a moment he got up. "Dead," he said. "And there's another going sick. Your mule, Bill." He pointed to the animal where it lay groaning on its side.

"Hang it, I thought we were going to reach the Crags tomorrow," said Bill.

"We can if somebody walks," said Kory.

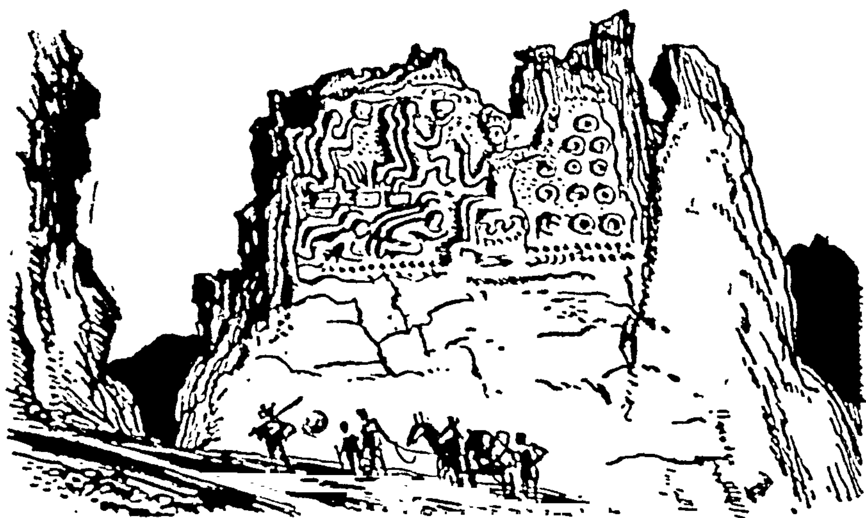
"Make that brute Tarara walk and I'll bag his mule. Do him good to get some fat down."

"Let him ride," said Kory. "We can't afford to upset the natives yet. I'll be the one to walk."

"Why, that's absurd——" Bill began.

"I insist. The sick mule can come with me if he's fit. David, watch Tarara tomorrow. Don't let him out of your sight."

When the camp woke soon after dawn, Bill noticed that Kory had gone. So had the sick mule. There was something else that Bill noticed. The stomach of the dead animal had been slit open with a knife.



CHAPTER II

SICK HEART POINT

Suddenly the forest ended and the Crags of King Thanasis came into view. The party had reached the beginning of a deep, narrow gorge. At the entrance Kory was waiting. He said that the mule was already better and he had found a camping place further up.

As they walked up the pass, Kory questioned David closely about Tarara.

"You didn't let him out of your sight?"

"No."

"And he didn't interfere with the mules?"

"I don't think so."

They reached the camp, a sort of hollow in the cliff with huge boulders outside. A camp fire was burning in the middle and there was a pile of wood beside it. Kory had carried it up himself.

Whenever anything exciting happened on this expedition, it was nearly always after dark. That evening they were sitting by the fire after supper, when something hit the rock above them violently.

"Seems as if a bird's lost his way and bumped into the cliff," said Bill uneasily.

"A bird wouldn't make that noise," said David. He picked up a torch to have a look.

It wasn't long before he found something—an arrow snapped in two. In one place the shaft had been slit and a piece of silver bark put in. David took it out.

"It's got your name on it, Kory. And there's a picture on the other side. Like a ship."

"A dhow," said Kory calmly, as he looked at it. "That bump is meant for a rock. It's going to wreck itself, you see."

The natives had gathered round and were staring at it. They were amazed and frightened.

"What can it mean?" said David.

"Don't ask me now."

"I can guess who sent it."

"That's easy," said Kory. "Gascar's mules are at the top end of the gorge."

"What!" exclaimed Uncle Bill.

"He's left them there in charge of two natives. Gascar and the others have gone on ahead."

A careful watch was kept that night, Bill and Kory taking two hours at a stretch in turns.

In the coldest part of the night when the fire was very low David woke up. Low voices sounded. They were Uncle Bill's and Kory's.

"Another mule dead," Bill was saying, "I found it just now. Must have been poisoned on purpose. I suppose it was you that slit that belly open yesterday, Kory? Did you find any poison inside?"

"Poisonous root," said Kory. "Same as killed the others. Here's a piece of it. I found it just now —in Tarara's saddle pocket."

"Seems he wants to poison the lot."

"All but seven, I think. Those natives are too lazy to walk home."

"We shall have to dismiss them in the morning. It's the only thing to do. Leaves us with two mules. Better than none, I suppose."

After breakfast the natives received their wages and were dismissed. The cowards were glad to go.

Bill, Kory, David, Shinko and two pack-mules —that was all the party consisted of now.

As they marched out of the gorge towards the Sculptured Crag, Kory explained to David about the natives. "I don't think they were acting for Gascar," he said. "They're just cowards. They're terrified of the unknown. The island is full of tales about the demons and terrors that lie beyond the Crags, and the natives believe them."

"Why did they come at all?" said David.

"Because they wanted to fill their purses. They're greedy for money. By poisoning the mules they wanted to make us turn back ourselves. They wanted to make us think the gods were against us and we couldn't succeed."

"Silly idiots to be frightened," said Shinko, who had been listening. "Shinko never frightened. Shinko very brave man."

"I wonder," said Kory, so quietly that only David heard.

They passed the Sculptured Crag mentioned in Captain Hardwick's papers. On it they could see the crude figures of the twelve kings paying tribute to King Thanasis.

Climbing all the time, they soon saw White Wing Peak in the distance. It looked quite near but was at least twenty miles away.

On the rocky ground the track died out. They picked it up again later, where the forest began. Squashed roots and newly broken twigs and branches showed that Gascar had passed here recently. They brought the mules over and followed the trail. The farther they went, the closer became the forest, the trail more and more like a tunnel through a hill. It was dark and gloomy. David wondered if they were walking into an ambush. In the distance they could hear a dull, thudding sound. It grew louder all the time. Suddenly, as the jungle opened up, it burst into a roar.

"Look," said Kory, pointing.

There was the roar, far below them—a very swift river, boiling over rocks. A bare headland stood out of the jungle, dropping deep into the water. They tied up the mules by the trees and walked on to the headland.

"Sick Heart Point," said Kory.

On the highest part of the headland, sunk into the rock, they found the first of the Tombs of the Kings mentioned in Captain Hardwick's papers. David knew the story—how the twelve Kings of the twelve islands had been defeated in battle by King Thanasis of Jungle Island. He had forced them to pay tribute to him, to give him precious stones and jewels. King Thanasis had hidden these

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"Did he find it?"

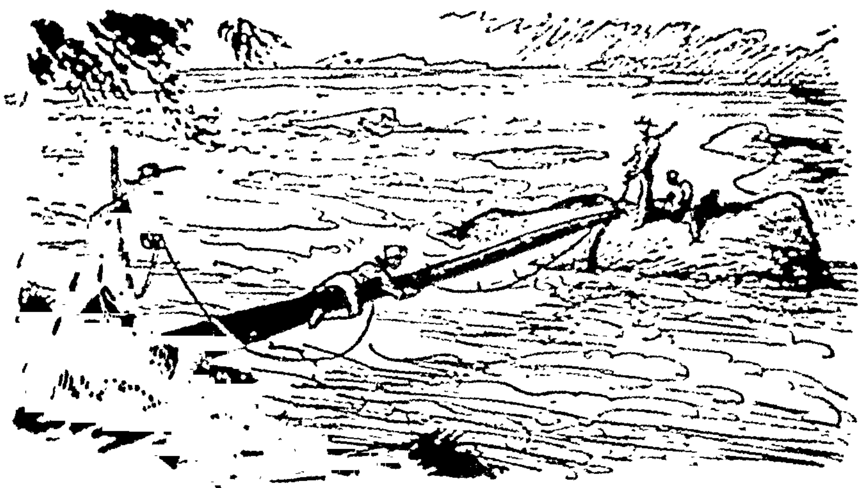
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Kory spent the rest of the day looking for the
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They all met again in the evening. Luckily Kory
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"Any sign of Gascar?" asked David.

"None at all. But I know he can't be far
From now on we must go very carefully."



CHAPTER 12

BANGS IN THE NIGHT

Crossing the river by the felled tree was far from easy. Bill went over first, creeping along like a snake. He had a rope tied round his middle, in case he fell into the fast swollen stream below. Shinko went next—he had to be hauled across. Then David. He slithered along slowly, grateful for the rope, gasping as the tree swayed under him and the spray soaked his clothes. Last of all went Kory. He walked across upright, swiftly and surely, as if he had done it fifty times before.

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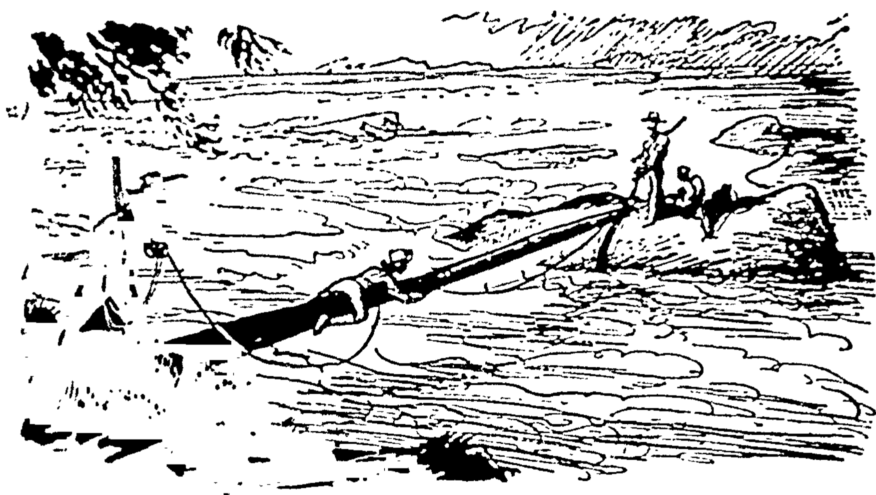
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As the tree did not reach right across, they had

to wade through the stream and jump from rock to rock for the rest of the way. This was not as hard as it sounds, for the water was quite shallow on this side. But they all got very wet.

When they reached the far side, they ran and jumped and flapped their arms to get dry and warm.

"Fly, fly, fly, fly!" said Shinko. He looked just like a top-heavy bird, as he flapped in and out of the trees.

They walked upstream, following the course of the river. There were not many trees, so they could move quickly. Uncle Bill went in front as scout, keeping a good couple of hundred yards ahead of the rest. Before going he arranged to signal in case of danger.

After some hours David saw him waving wildly. At once they took cover behind a rock. Bill ran back to them.

"Smoke," he said. "There's a fire round the bend on the headland."

"See anybody?"

"Not a soul. There's no flame showing. Looks as if it's been lit some time."

"What sort of headland is it?"

"Like Sick Heart Point, only smaller. Juts out into the river."

Kory looked at the map. "I wonder if it's the second tomb. There's a cross here on the map."

"I'll go and find out," said Uncle Bill.

"Take no risks then," said Kory. "Rifle loaded?"

Bill nodded, and off he went.

They waited tensely for him to return.

He was soon back. "I scrambled up the headland and looked round," he said. "The fire seemed to have been lit this morning. Not a sign of anybody. I found a burnt tin and this pocket knife—probably Gascar's. You were right about the tomb. It's sunk into the rock and the top stone has been torn out. The skeleton looks as if Gascar had been jumping on it. Don't look so scared, Shinko. Wait till Gascar starts jumping on you. Come along and see."

"No, no, no," said Shinko, his cheeks shivering with fright. "I stay here."

"We'll all go together," said Kory.

And they did. Shinko was not going to be the only one to stay behind.

"I smell danger," said Kory, when they had seen the tomb on the headland. "We must fence ourselves in tonight." He had found a good spot where the forest touched the edge of a piece of steep cliff. With the cliff behind them, they would only have to build a barrier on the one side.

There was only one axe, so they took it in turns to cut down four good tree-trunks. Shinko's turn came last, by which time it was very nearly dark. He didn't want to go. He was afraid of being in the forest alone. But when Bill said to him, "You're not scared, are you, Shinko?" the cook replied, "Shinko never never scared." And without another word he took the axe and walked into the wood.

"I never thought he had the guts," said Bill.

While Shinko was away, the rest went on building the barrier. Then they ate their supper—cold supper again, as they dared not light a fire. David tried hard to pretend the cold stringy duck was hot fish and chips.

In the forest sounded the knock, knock, knock of the axe. Shinko was not far away, but it was already too dark to see him.

There was a sudden splitting noise, a crack, a breaking of branches. Then silence. Then a fearful scream.

Shinko came bounding back through the trees.

"Oh masters, masters! I am killed. Twenty devils jumped on me. Twenty devils with green eyes. Oh masters!" And he burst into sobs.

"Pull yourself together," said Kory. He seized him by the shoulders and shook him. This made him cry all the more.

Kory struck him across the cheek once, twice. Shinko stopped his noise. Laying his head in Kory's lap, he cried softly.

"Did you really see devils?" said Kory.

"I never tell lies, master. Thirty devils I counted——"

"You said twenty," said Bill.

"No, thirty devils I see. With flashing red eyes——"

"Green," said Bill. "You've got it wrong, old man. With teeth like piano keys and long strings of dribble——"

"No dribble, no dribble at all," cried Shinko, and he started his story all over again.

When he had calmed down, Bill lit his pipe and said that, devils or no devils, he was going out to fetch in Shinko's tree-trunk.

Shinko flung his arms round Bill's legs. "You shan't go. You be killed, like Shinko."

Bill threw him off and stepped over the barrier.

Bang!

A bullet struck the tree above his head.

Bill dived behind the barrier. "Shinko was right," he muttered.

"Bill, put your pipe out. Lie down, everybody," said Kory quietly.

Without the fourth tree the barrier was too low

to give cover enough. The stone wall, which they had built three feet high, was big enough for two to hide behind. Kory and Bill hid behind this, pointing their rifles over the top. David lay on the ground, hugging his knife. With trembling hands Shinko loaded Kory's rifle.

They stared into the darkness, waiting for something to happen. Somewhere in that darkness the enemy were hiding—how many? Three, four, five? From the hide-out in the tree outside Port Jasmin Bill had seen a party of eight leaving the town. None had been seen since then. Some had stayed behind to look after the horses, perhaps two, not more than three. Then there must be five or six hiding here among the trees . . .

"Look, the moon!" said David.

For a long moment the moon peeped down, then vanished behind a cloud.

"See anything?"

Silence.

Nothing happened for an hour.

"I can't bear this waiting," said David. "Why doesn't something happen?"

The minutes crawled by. No moon.

"Perhaps they've cleared out."

Then Bill said, "The moon's coming back again."

This time the moon stayed longer, painting everything silver—the trees, the barrier——

Bang!

The moon faded.

"Anybody hurt?"

"I think it hit the barrier," said Bill.

"See where it came from?"

"Those branches thirty yards ahead—I saw the flame spurt. He's above us."

So the firing came from above. The higher the shooting, the less use was the barrier.

Then Bill had an idea. He told Kory. He wanted Kory to draw the fire while he himself noted the exact spot where it came from.

When next the moon appeared, David saw Kory's arm move. He was holding a stick, with something round tied to the top. He raised it above the barrier and waved it gently from side to side.

A shot rang out. The bullet hit the top of the stick.

"Fixed him," said Bill, dropping his head quickly. "He's in that big tree over there, the double one. I'm going to fetch him."

They lay quiet till the moon had gone.

"You've a good ten minutes before the moon comes back," said Kory. "Move as quickly as you dare. The noise of the river will deaden the sound, except for the twigs. Tread quickly."

Bill slipped over the barrier and was gone.

David waited anxiously as the minutes dragged on. Suppose Gascar was waiting between the barrier and the tree. Suppose they were all there, ready to pounce on Bill. Suppose the moon came out and he were caught in the light, what a target!

Another shot rang out, a flash in the night. It came from the same spot as before.

Another long silence.

"The moon's coming back," said Kory. "Keep your heads down."

But David was peering above the barrier. When the moon came, he saw a pale glow, no movement at all. The glow faded.

In the darkness two shots rang out. There was a noise of breaking branches.

"Fire when I say," said Kory. "Into the air, above your head. Ready? . . ." He gave the order.

Shinko's rifle barked, then Kory's. They fired again.

"That should scare them," said David.

There were no more shots from the other side of the barrier. With ears strained for the slightest sound, the three waited, waited. Had Bill got his man? Was it Bill who had fallen from the tree? He should be back by now if he were safe.

Kory moved suddenly. A rustling sound outside. David caught his breath.

"Quick, give us a hand with him!" It was Bill's voice. He was panting hard.

Kory stood up and stepped over the barrier. The next moment there were five figures behind the barrier, one of them limp and still.

"He's dead all right. Well done," said Kory.

"The moon showed him up just in time," said Bill.

"Who shot first?"

Bill laughed. "He didn't get a chance to shoot at all. Both shots were mine."

"They won't attack again tonight," said Kory.

"What makes you so sure?"

"Listen. Do you hear that wailing?" said Kory.

In the darkness not very far away a wailing had started, loud enough to be heard above the river.

"We've taken the heart right out of them. They're terrified," said Kory.

All the same, Kory and Bill decided to take it in turns to keep watch for the rest of the night. David and Shinko slept as best they could.

Thus the long night passed.

CHAPTER 13

SOMETHING BRIGHT IN THE GRASS

"What shall we do with the body?" said Kory.

The first sign of dawn was showing in the sky. Kory, Bill and Shinko were ready.

"Chuck it over the cliff," said Bill. "Now, before David wakes."

Kory peered into the dim forest. "They'll attack when it's a bit lighter, but I think we're safe for the moment. Catch hold of the legs and turn the body sideways. Mind the boy. Splendid. Now we can roll it——"

Three shots rang out.

Bill dropped the legs and fell to the ground, gripping his left shoulder.

"Lie down, David," said Kory. The boy had woken with a start. In an instant Kory had smothered him down.

"Bill, are you hurt?"

"Get that body out of the way," said Bill.

It was right on the edge of the cliff. One shove, and it was over.

"Are you hurt?"

"Nothing that matters. Grazed shoulder. Where's my rifle?"

He reached for it and knelt with Kory behind the barrier. Shinko was holding his head in his hands.

The enemy firing had started again. It sounded nearer.

Kory's rifle rang out.

"They're making for the headland," said Kory. "Two of them behind that bush."

"Shall I dress your shoulder, Uncle Bill?" said David. It was bleeding freely.

The answer was a shot from his rifle.

"I wish I could help," said David, who was feeling useless without a rifle.

"You can help by watching last night's tree," said Kory. "They may attack from there as well."

Kory turned out to be right. They were attacking from two places now. One party was moving towards the headland, which was higher up and farther out in the gorge. If they got here they would be able to shoot broadside on to Kory's party, slightly behind them. The barrier would be



THE BARRICADE

useless. Then it would be a question of move or die.

More shots.

"They're away out of that bush. Watch the open ground in front of the headland."

The firing beside David began again. Bill returned it.

"Thirty men I see in the trees," cried Shinko. "Oh, we are dead men, master."

"Nonsense," said Kory. "There can't be more than five of them. We stay where we are till I give the word. If we have to move, then it's each man for himself. The trees give good shelter. Shinko and I cover the headland. Bill——"

He was interrupted by a dash from the enemy. Three of them were racing across the open ground before the headland.

Two shots rang out, a third.

"Hit one of them," said Bill. "He's fallen among the roots. Arm, I think."

David shouted, "Gascar! I can see Gascar. Quick, Uncle Bill!"

Bill swung round to where David was pointing. The leaves were very still. Nothing moved.

A shot and a puff of smoke.

"I see him," said Bill. Taking careful aim, he fired.

There was a howl from the leaves not ten yards away. Something stumbled, parting the branches. For an instant Gascar was seen, then disappeared.

Bill fired again. He glanced quickly towards the headland. No natives were to be seen. Kory and Shinko had the place well covered.

"Can't let Gascar get away," said Bill. "David, I'm going after him."

"Can I come with you?"

"No, you little fool, stay where you are."

"I could knife him."

"Stay where you are."

Bill jumped over the barrier and dashed behind the nearest tree. Satisfied, he went farther, crawling through the roots.

Shinko howled. "Master, they reach the headland! Oh, we are dead men in our graves!"

A head appeared above the rock, the nose of a rifle.

Bang!

The bullet hit the cliff side of the barrier an inch from Kory's head.

"It's *they* who are in their graves," said Kory calmly. "They're using the old King's grave as a trench to shoot from. I wish we'd thought of that."

Another muzzle appeared from the same spot. At once Kory gave the order to move. Quick as

was much trampled, yet all was very quiet. The firing sounded a long way off.

Listen! Was that a twig that cracked? A rustle of leaves? Perhaps only a bird.

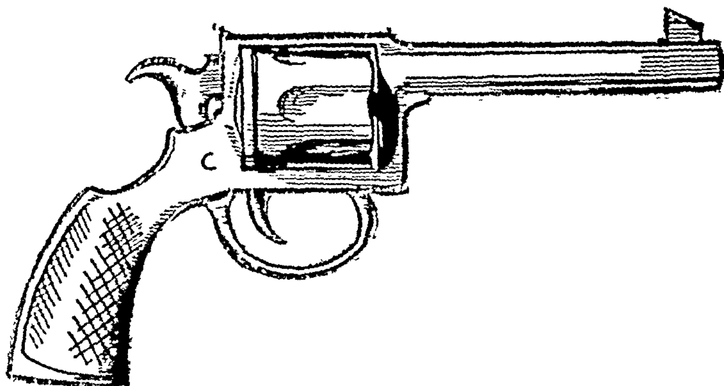
For some time he lay quite still. When he was quite sure there was nobody near, he raised his head slowly and sat up.

Something in the grass caught his eye, bright and shiny—a snake? He looked again. It wasn't moving. He crawled towards it. It was a pistol.

He snatched it greedily. The metal was warm in his hand. There was a smell of burnt powder. Gascar's? It must be Gascar's. Gascar must have dropped it when Bill hit him.

What terrific luck! Now he could join the rest like a man.

Suddenly something heavy struck his head, and he knew no more.



CHAPTER 14

TAKEN PRISONER

After a troubled sleep David woke. Where was he?

The loaded pistol was lying in the grass. He picked it up. But surely he had picked it up already? It was loaded, wasn't it?

He opened the chamber—it was empty.

Somebody laughed.

"I'm sorry, but I really couldn't leave it loaded. Little boys with live cartridges aren't safe." It was Gascar's voice. He was sitting in the grass beside him.

At first David was too dizzy to realise what had happened. Then he gasped. He shouted for help. "Bill! Kory! Shinko!"

Faintly the echo sounded down the woods.

"That's all the answer you'll get," said Gascar.

"Nonsense. They're behind those trees, attacking your men on the headland."

"Listen, boy. Listen carefully. Do you hear any firing? No. All you can hear is the wind in the trees and the roar of the river eighty feet below."

"It's not the river I know."

"Of course not. I've carried you a long way. We're higher here, right under the mountain."

David looked up. Over the cliffs, beyond the tree tops shone the snows of White Wing Peak. The wind was whistling. He felt very cold, helpless and lonely.

"Where's Uncle Bill?"

"I don't know."

"Oh yes you do, you swine, you butcher, you——" He dived at Gascar and hit out at him with his fists.

Gascar threw him off. He caught his arm and twisted it behind his back till he yelled with pain. "You little fool," he hissed between his teeth. "If you try that again, you'll not live to be sorry for it."

David sank back breathless to the ground and lay there gasping and trying to keep the tears back.

After a while Gascar spoke.

"I dropped the pistol on purpose—to trap you. I could have killed you, but I banged you on the head instead. Yes, it's a good big bruise, isn't it?"

"Where's Uncle Bill?"

"I've told you I don't know. I sent him an invitation to come and talk things over. But he hasn't come yet. I'm still waiting and time's getting short. He has only till tomorrow morning to

accept my terms. These are the terms. He must go home at once and leave me to the treasure. If he agrees, you will be handed back unharmed. If he refuses, we shall hang you and throw your body over the cliff."

"Uncle Bill will refuse," said David.

"I'm not so sure. He's fond of you, you know. And he must answer to your mother for your safety."

"I know he'll find a way out," said David. "Are the others safe? What about Kory?"

"Kory? Don't let me hear that hated name!" roared Gascar, anger blazing from his eyes.

David had touched a sore spot. For a time he sat in silence, shivering and miserable. It was colder than ever. At last he got up enough courage to ask for a fire to be lit—there was quite a pile of sticks at the cliff edge.

"It's not safe in this wind," said Gascar sourly. "The forest would catch fire. You must wait till evening when the wind drops."

Later he fetched the boy some food, mostly berries and bread-fruit. Was it poisoned? When Gascar ate some himself without falling down dead, David decided it was all right to go ahead. He had eaten nothing since the previous evening and was very hungry.

While they were eating, one of Gascar's men came running up through the trees. He spoke excitedly to Gascar in the native language. Gascar looked pleased.

"I shall have to leave you," he told David. "A pressing appointment."

"With Uncle Bill?"

"Never mind."

Before going, Gascar had a word with the native and handed him a loaded rifle.

"Six cartridges to keep you out of mischief, David," he said, as he checked the chamber. Then he vanished into the trees.

David was alone with the native.



CHAPTER 15

A DESPERATE ESCAPE

David got up and had a good look round. Meanwhile the native sat quietly with his rifle across his knee. It was getting colder all the time. The snow on the peaks cast a chill on everything.

David walked a step or two. The huge white eyes of the guard followed him. He walked to the edge of the cliff and looked down. Eighty feet below the stream tumbled down the gully. On the far side there was no cliff at all. The ground there was covered with boulders, with forest behind and White Wing Peak towering above.

He looked at the cliff edge where he was standing. Was there any way of escape here? But Gascar had chosen his camp well. The cliff was an overhang. Over the edge trailed the long roots of giant trees—how far down did they drop? David leaned over as far as he dared. But the cliff was too steep for him to see what lay below.

With a sigh he walked back and lay down on the ground, wrapping himself in the rug Gascar had left. He was glad when on Gascar's return in the evening a fire was lit. He sat in front of it, stretching out his hands to the blaze. Gascar sat beside him, revolver in hand; on the other side of the fire two natives. These two took their turn at guarding the camp, when the other two (there seemed to be only four altogether) filled their places at the fire.

The maddest plans raced round in David's mind. Dare he make a sudden dash and trust to the darkness to hide him? or grab the revolver and shoot them all? He could not make up his mind. What was Uncle Bill doing? Would he risk an attack on the camp?

As the night wore on, he became very tired. Soon he fell asleep.

He dreamt of Uncle Bill and woke up to find him there beside him, in the circle of the camp fire.

He was talking angrily to Gascar. David blinked and rubbed his eyes. Was he only dreaming?

He sat up and tried to touch Uncle Bill.

"Lie down, child," snapped Gascar.

Bill smiled at David, but he could not hide the look of hopelessness on his face. Turning wearily to Gascar, he went on talking.

"I've offered to go halves on the treasure. What can you ask fairer?"

"I am not changing my terms," said Gascar.

"I'll double the offer. You can have twice our share. On my honour——"

"I don't trust you. An Englishman has no honour."

Bill was stung by the insult. But Gascar went on.

"Show me your right hand. You have something closed in it—a note. You were trying to pass it to the boy without my seeing."

"There's nothing in my hand." Bill opened his palm.

"You were quick enough to toss it in the fire. There it is, crumpling in the flames. And you talk to me of honour!" He was trembling with rage. "Get out of here. You know my answer. In the morning, when the sun has topped the mountain, you'll find David where I told you—at the foot of this cliff."

Bill stood up, controlling himself with an effort. He looked at David, tried to say something, but no words came.

Then he was gone.

The fire died down.

A sudden gust of wind sent sparks flying into the darkness. Gascar woke the sleepy natives and made them beat out the fire. "We want no accidents," he said.

Sleepily they obeyed, then lay down again.

As the night grew colder, David slept only fitfully. His limbs were numb and he was shivering. How long were the hours before dawn! Would day never break?

When at last the darkness faded from the sky, Gascar shook off his blanket and woke the two natives. He thought David was asleep and did not disturb him. But the boy was only pretending. A desperate plan was in his mind. He meant to escape.

With half-closed eyes David watched the dim shapes of the natives moving about in the grey light. Each moment it was growing lighter. And the wind was getting stronger.

Suddenly the third native, who had been on guard in the woods, ran up to Gascar and spoke excitedly to him. Gascar glanced quickly at David

to make sure he was still asleep. Then he hurried with the native into the woods.

What had taken Gascar away? Had some last-minute plan of Bill's been found out? Did Bill wish to surrender? Whatever the reason might be, now was the time for David to act.

He sat up, yawned, threw back his blanket, and asked for something to eat.

The two natives stopped chopping wood and pointed to a flat stone where some biscuits and wild berries were lying. While David helped himself, they went on with their chopping.

He ate all he had time for. Then he stuffed a few biscuits in his pocket and walked over to the cliff edge. It was still not really light. But he could see the tops of the giant roots swinging down the overhang towards the dim shape of the river so far below. His plan was to slide down the roots, hand over hand, in the hope that they reached down to the water. Suppose they didn't? Suppose they finished in mid-air, leaving him hanging sixty feet above the torrent? Suppose the natives saw him and hacked at the roots with their axes?

It was a mad plan—but it was better than being killed by Gascar.

The dawn was brighter now. He must act quickly.

He bent down, right on the edge.

One of the natives stopped chopping wood and cried out.

David waved back. Then, pretending to lose his balance, he yelled and fell over. As he fell, he grabbed for the roots.

He caught one.

Hand over hand he dropped down.

He was swinging in space. With burning hands, with knees and ankles gripping hard, he clung on.

Above him voices quarrelled.

He looked up and saw he was under the overhang. He could not see the natives, and they could not see him. They were not hacking at the roots. Did they think he had fallen into the torrent?

The root he was clinging to swung in the wind dizzily, like the pendulum of a clock. Down and down he slid—till suddenly his feet were free of the root, kicking the empty air. He had reached the end of the root and was barely halfway to the water! To let go and jump was murder. What was he to do?

As he swung there, he saw a longer root beside him—somehow he must reach it. His knees were hurting, his hands numb with cold. Desperately he put his weight into the swinging, from side to side. He let go with one hand—and grasped. For a



A LONG WAY DOWN

CHAPTER 16

THE TREASURE CAVE

"Yes, it was me that started the fire," said Uncle Bill.

He was walking back with David towards the headland by the King's grave. David had found him waiting for him near a crossing place downstream, below the burnt forest.

"How did you know it wouldn't burn me up with it?"

"I realised you'd escaped."

"How did you know?"

"I was talking to Gascar in the wood, trying to delay him, when I heard your cry. Then a native came rushing through the trees, shouting for Gascar. I guessed you'd escaped, but for the moment I didn't know how. Then I saw them look over the cliff and point, while Gascar ran along the edge—he'd forgotten all about me! The idea of the fire came to my mind. I ran back a little way and set fire to a tree, the driest I could find. It went up in a few seconds, and of course the flames spread. I was

quite safe myself as the wind was behind me, and the fire was sweeping up to Gascar and his camp."

"What happened to Gascar?"

"Roasted alive."

"Did you see it happen?"

"The last I saw of him he was climbing up one of those giant trees, the flames reaching up after him. The tree toppled and crashed, taking him with it."

"And the others?"

"There's a body farther up, in the torrent, wedged between two rocks—if it's not been swept away. I didn't see the others. But there's not a hope for any of them. The whole forest above where the two torrents meet is a burnt waste from shore to shore. Nobody could survive in such scorching heat."

They met Kory and Shinko on the headland by the King's grave and camped there for the night. It was a merry party that sat round the camp fire —they knew now that their way to the treasure was clear.

After so much danger and excitement David was unwell next day. So he stayed behind with Shinko and rested, while Kory and Bill went off to look for the cave. In the evening they returned and reported that the ground where the fire had been was so hot that they'd had to turn back. They had

then tried David's route, on the other side of the torrent, and found it more hopeful. There wasn't time to get to the three caves mentioned in Captain Hardwick's papers. But they'd sighted them through the glasses.

Next morning they were up very early. Bill, Kory and David were to be the treasure party. Shinko was to stay behind and prepare a feast for the evening.

They moved fast along the steep ground, keeping close to the torrent. Soon they passed the place where David had dragged himself out of the water, half-drowned. The cliff on the other side was still smoking. Later, when they were much higher, they looked down and saw far below them the black waste which had once been rich forest.

At the foot of White Wing Peak they came to the first cave. It was damp and dripping and did not look very hopeful, so they tried the second one, a little higher up. This was even smaller and more cramped.

"The legend goes that the treasure is in the third chamber," said Bill, who was looking at one of Captain Hardwick's papers.

From the outside the third cave looked quite hopeless. The entrance was tiny, and water splashed out of it and flowed down the mountain

in a thin stream. Wading inside, they found the cave waterlogged and very dark. But soon their eyes got used to the darkness, and they could see a hole high up which let in a little light.

They walked round the walls together, feeling the rock with their hands, while water swished round their feet.

"A hole," said Bill.

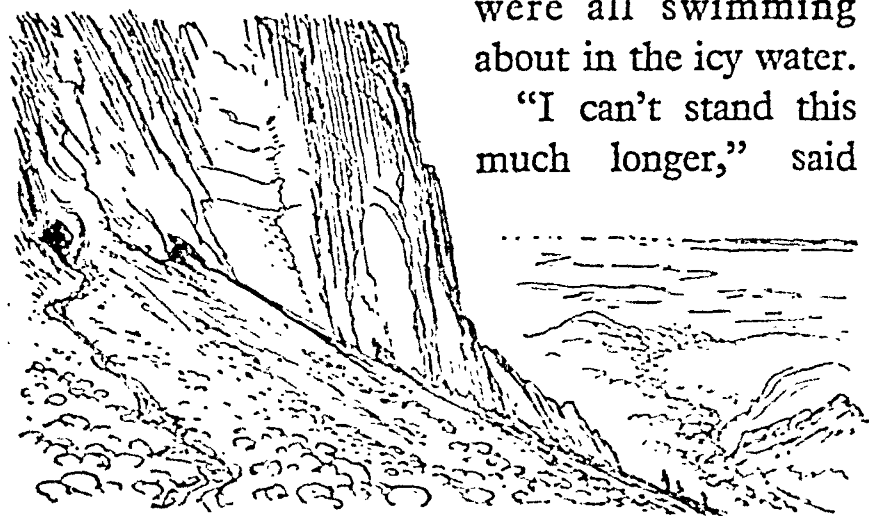
"It's a sort of tunnel," said David. "The water's rushing out."

Stooping, with water up to their knees rushing past them, they made their way up the tunnel.

Then Kory cried out, his voice ringing like a gong, "I'm in the second chamber! There's more light. But the water's deeper."

In a moment they were all swimming about in the icy water.

"I can't stand this much longer," said



Bill, his teeth chattering. "I don't see much point in staying here. Nobody would bury his treasure in a cave of water."

"It may have been flooded since," said David.

"There's a break in the wall on this side, under the surface," said Kory.

They swam over to him.

"I can feel the c-current underneath," said David. "It's pushing my legs away."

"I'm frozen. Let's get out," said Bill.

"N-n-not yet," said David. "It's an important d-d-d-discovery."

"Come here, you floating iceberg," said Bill. "We're getting out right now."

A few minutes later they were out of the cave in the daylight, jumping up and down in the sun to get warm.

"Seems we've drawn blank again," said Bill gloomily. "There's no third chamber."

"Perhaps the hole in the wall leads into the third chamber," said David.

"It's under water. How d'you think the treasure got in?" said Bill.

"The water level must have risen. You can't expect it to stay the same for two thousand years."

"The boy may be right," said Kory quietly. "Anyway, I'm going to see. Have you got any rope?"

There wasn't any rope. But David found a piece of string in his rucksack. "We could use it as a telephone," he said. "I mean, tie it to Kory and hold the other end. A long pull means 'I've arrived'. Lots of quick jerks means 'I'm drowning'——"

"And no jerks at all means 'I'm dead'," finished Bill.

"Yes," said David.

So they tried it like that. Kory tied the string to his ankle, took a deep breath and dived, while Bill held grimly on to the other end.

The string moved slowly at first. Then suddenly it whipped along and was jerked right out of his hand.

"That means he's through. Three cheers for Kory," said David, and the cave echoed his cheers.

Soon Kory's head spluttered above the water. He was back—and between his teeth a blue crystal was shining.

"A sapphire!" cried Bill.

"Are there any more?" said David. "Diamonds? Rubies? Pearls? Answer me quick."

"Go and see," said Kory. "You've only two yards underwater to swim."

"Me first," said Bill. A deep breath, a dive and he was gone.

"Now me," said David. He disappeared.

The third chamber was the darkest and smallest of all, but there was a pale shine under the water. It was full of blue and red lights.

"I can see two chests underneath," said Kory.

He dived and came up with a handful of rubies. These he stuffed into David's pocket.

Bill dived and came up with two handfuls.

David dived. But he misfired and came up with nothing.

Then they went outside to fetch their shirts, which they had left drying in the sun. They wanted to use them for wrapping up the jewels in.

Half an hour later they were sitting outside in the afternoon sunlight, emptying pockets, undoing shirt parcels and counting the precious stones.

"Put 'em all in the rucksack," said Bill.

Soon they were hurrying back to camp, Bill and David shouting and singing at their good fortune.

For some reason Kory was even quieter than usual. At sunset, when they came in sight of the headland where they had left Shinko, Kory stopped suddenly. He stooped and picked something up. Then he gave a sudden start.

He recovered himself quickly when he saw that Bill and David were watching him.

Bill and David were puzzled. What could it mean?

CHAPTER 17

CRIES IN THE NIGHT

Shinko came running forward joyfully to meet them.

"You find the treasure? Yes? Oh my masters, Shinko a rich man now. Shinko like a king."

"You shall have your share, I promise," said Bill. "Have you cooked us a good supper? We're mighty hungry."

They were coming into camp as Shinko answered, "I cook you a feast for kings. It is wonderful. All day I make you the jungle pudding—look at it here."

He pointed—then dropped his hand in amazement. The pudding had vanished. Only five minutes before he had taken the pot off the fire and poured the pudding into a dish to cool. Where had it gone?

"Some hungry animal about," said Bill.

A cry rang through the jungle. They listened tensely for another. But there was only the echo, then silence.

"That's the animal that ate the pudding," said Bill. "And now he sounds as if he's got the belly-ache."

"Where's the dish?" said Kory.

"He's eaten that too," said Shinko.

"No wonder he's feeling queer," said Bill.

The cry came again, twice. And the echoes rang through the jungle. Shinko started to howl.

"Oh, do shut up, Shinko. You're giving us the creeps," said David.

"He's coming, he's coming," cried Shinko. "Oh masters, the belly-ache monster will swallow us."

"When he eats you, Shinko, he'll fall down dead —poisoned," said Bill. "So what are you worrying about?"

In spite of the joking, they were all feeling very uneasy. In the dark moonless night they crowded round the fire, eating the meal that Shinko had cooked.

"Kory, tell us a tale to cheer us up," said Bill.

"I can tell you a tale, but it may not cheer you."

Then this strange, silent man began to tell them the story of his life. In his youth he had been a pearl diver. He told them that once he had seen another diver being attacked by a shark. He had dived in to save him, killing the shark with his knife. "Then I swam to save the man. To my

amazement he lashed out at me with his knife—was he mad? The name of that man was——"

Again the cry rang through the night.

"The monster is upon us," yelled Shinko.

"Put a sock in it," said Bill. Not having a sock handy, he tied a scarf round Shinko's mouth.



"You were going to tell us the man's name," said David.

"His name," said Kory, "was Gascar."

He went on to tell them that Gascar had been a jealous rival in the pearl business. Less successful than Kory, he had tried to wreck Kory's dhows. "Do you remember the piece of bark and the broken arrow at the Sculptured Crags? On the bark was a drawing of a dhow being wrecked on a rock. Gascar had bribed the steersman to wreck

Kory took something from his pocket and handed it to Bill. It was a small piece of bark. There was some writing on the inside. "I picked it up on the path this evening. The writing was still wet."

"It's in the native language," said Bill.

Poor Shinko was staring at it over Kory's shoulder. Suddenly his eyes opened wide in terror.

"Take the scarf off," said Kory. "He has something to tell us."

They took it off.

In a trembling voice Shinko read out these words: " 'I MEAN TO BEAT YOU YET.' "

"So Gascar *is* alive!" exclaimed Bill.

"Now we know who stole the jungle pudding," said David. "Wait till I get at him."

"Ten thousand devils, what did I do with the treasure?" said Bill. He was rushing round the fire looking for it, turning up stones, wood, clothes, everything. He gasped with relief when Kory calmly passed it to him, still in the rucksack. Bill had been sitting on it all the time.

"Where are our rifles?" said David.

"Beside me here. Loaded," said Kory.

"Good thing you hid them while we were gone. I expect Gascar's unarmed or he would have attacked," said Bill.

"Listen. We may hear his cry again," said Kory. "He must be watching us. Now—outside in the darkness."

They listened, listened, listened.

Except for the noise of the river and the crackle of the fire the night was silent.

But the silence was full of terror.

"Shall we fire a volley into the forest?" said Bill.

"It might calm our nerves a bit," said Kory.

The two of them cocked their rifles and fired.

After the echo, a long silence.

Then in the darkness sounded that same cry again, wild and crazy with despair.



CHAPTER 18

THE FIGHT ON THE HEADLAND

David was so tired that nothing could have kept him awake. But the others were awake all night. Bill and Kory sat with their rifles across their knees, patient and watchful till daybreak.

When David woke, what did he see? Kory and Bill were standing near, busy talking. Shinko was beside him, gripping his rifle and looking at a figure sitting on the ground—Gascar.

The man was a pitiful sight, with hollow

cheeks, his mouth stained with blood. Kory and Bill had found him not thirty yards from camp, wandering in a dazed way from tree to tree. As he went he searched under stones and roots, muttering, "Ah, the treasure! Where is my treasure? Where are the jewels of King Thanasis?" He came quietly into camp, the muzzles of Kory's rifle and Bill's rifle pressed into the hollow of his back.

Now Kory and Bill were discussing what to do with him. He was mad, Bill said. He had escaped from the forest fire with his life, but without his wits.

"He must be shot," said Kory. "There can be no peace till Gascar is dead."

"D'you think it's real—his madness, I mean?"

"I shall never trust Gascar till he's dead."

Suddenly, with a wild cry Gascar jumped up and sprang at Shinko. The rifle went off. He tried to tear it from Shinko's hands. Shinko hung on, yelled, bit him in the arm till he howled with pain.

The rifle fell to the ground. David dived for it and picked it up. He pointed it at Gascar. But the two men were rolling on the ground together.

"For God's sake don't shoot!" Kory shouted. He was beside David—now over the struggling couple. "Gascar! I'm ready for you. This is the chance I've been waiting for. Turn and fight me —alone!"



HE TRIED TO TEAR IT FROM SHINKO'S HANDS

Gascar took no notice.

With angry eyes Kory sprang at Gascar. H
caught him under the arms and tried to drag hin
from Shinko. For a few seconds Gascar hung oı
and the two were dragged together. Then h
screamed and let go. With a terrific twist h
wriggled out of Kory's arms, scrambled to his feet
and faced the new enemy.

Kory struck him on the jaw, his muscles packed behind the punch. Gascar fell back, recovered himself. Breathing heavily, his long arms drooping from his shoulders, he watched for an opening. They struck together, clinched, fell into the cinders where the fire had been. A cloud of cinder dust rolled up. They coughed and spluttered. Kory tore his hands free and punched the face under him again and again. With amazing courage Gascar wrenched himself free from his enemy, clear of the wood ash. Only Kory's back could be seen by the watchers. His leaning head and heaving shoulders showed how tired he was.

"Go it, Kory!" said David.

"You've beaten him," said Bill.

Gascar went in with a straight left. Kory stopped it. He tried again. Kory bent down, rammed his left shoulder into the man's stomach. It was a brilliant move, quite unexpected. Gascar gasped, half